

\$5



goal!

W e e k l y

A-League Round 26 Friday 23rd Mar - Sunday 25th Mar 2012

FINAL ROUND CRUNCH TIME ARRIVES



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EYES ON THE PRIZE!

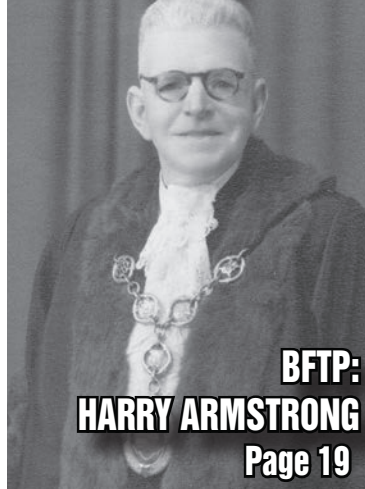
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PELADA AUSTRALIA FUTSAL CLUB CHAMPIONSHIPS

Juniors April 6th 2012 | Seniors April 7th 2012

Mullen double caps off magical Asian night

Adelaide Utd 2
Gamba Osaka 0

Two first half goals from defender Daniel Mullen has given Adelaide United FC another memorable and historic AFC Champions League scalp as they overwhelmed Gamba Osaka 2-0 at Hindmarsh Stadium.

The Reds' unlikely goal scorer capitalised on two superbly executed set pieces to maintain the Reds' perfect record after two games and leave them on top of the group after Bunyodkor upset Pohang in Korea in the other Group E fixture.

The victory also gave United its first win over Gamba in four attempts and condemned the decorated J-League club to their first ever loss against an Australian team.

The Red had winners all over the field in the first half. Dario Vidosic sent the first warning shot in the 12th minute when he teased the Gamba defence before unleashing a venomous drive that Gamba keeper Yosuke Fujigaya knew little about but he somehow managed to parry the ball over the bar.

Then five minutes later, the Reds exposed Gamba's defensive weakness in the air to go in front. Mullen headed a delightful Vidosic free kick into the crossbar but the Adelaide born 22 year old would not be denied twice, as his follow up header from the rebound took a deflection off Gamba's Korean striker Lee Seung-Yeoul and totally deceive Fujigaya.

The Reds struck again from another well worked free kick, this time it was an inswinger from Cassio that had Gamba all at sea, Djite's header initially denied by an under siege Fujigaya, but an alert Mullen was the first to react and he could not miss from point blank range. If he didn't score Djite would have, and remarkably the Reds were two goals up.

Further enhancing the result was that the Reds managed to keep a clean sheet against a club that they lost to five-nil on aggregate across two legs back in the 2008 ACL Final. Sure this current Gamba side appeared a level



Daniel Mullen celebrates after scoring for Adelaide United. Photo: ADAM BUTLER

Match Details

Adelaide United FC 2 (Mullen 17'/24')

Gamba Osaka 0

Referee: Mohamed Abdelkarim Alzarooni (UAE)

Crowd: 5,112 @ Hindmarsh Stadium

Watson, 15.Jacob Melling, 20.Mark Birighitti (Gk)

Yellow Cards: Mullen 36'

Red Cards: Nil

Gamba Osaka Line-Up: 1.Yosuke Fujigaya (Gk), 2.Sota Nakazawa, 4.Hiroki Fujiharu, 7.Yasuhito Endo, 9.Rafinha, 11.Paulinho (10.Takahiro Futagawa 77'), 15.Yasuyuki Konno, 17.Tomokazu Myojin (C) (13.Shinichi Terada 71'), 21.Akira Kaji, 23.Takuya Takei, 37.Lee Seung-Yeoul (8.Hayato Sasaki 64')

Substitutes Not Used: 5.Daiki Niwa, 14.Shu Kurata, 25.Hiroyuki Abe, 29.Atsushi Kimura (Gk)

Yellow Cards: Nakazawa 24', Kaji 90+1'

below the one almost four years ago, but the Reds again showed the discipline to restrict one of Asia's most well known clubs.

An extremely pleased Luciano Trani credited the Reds' ability to carry out a game plan and galvanise together after what has been a disappointing domestic campaign.

"Tonight was just a chance for the players to make up for what has been a poor season in the A-League and I think

we've just seen if the outcomes in terms of our discipline is there, anything can be achieved," Trani said.

"It's like everything – if you are organised from the start you are always going to give yourself a chance of being competitive and I think now that we've taken our chances with our set plays, they're obviously making a huge difference in some of our games, and hopefully that continues on in the ACL."

Group E Standings											
Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts			
1 ADL UTD	2	2	0	0	4	1	3	6			
2 POHANG	2	1	0	1	3	2	1	3			
3 BUNYOD	2	1	0	1	3	2	1	3			
4 GAMBA	2	0	0	2	0	5	-5	0			

CC Mariners 1
Nagoya Grampus 1

AN inspired Central Coast Mariners team has drawn 1-1 with J-League giants Nagoya Grampus at Central Coast Stadium in matchday 2 of the AFC Champions League.

Patrick Zwaanswijk's 28th minute header helped earn the Mariners the deserved draw which also saw Graham Arnold's side remain undefeated in this year's version of Asia's premier club competition.

Japanese international defender Markus Tulio Tanaka had given Dragan Stojkovic's men the lead in the 21st minute after he poked home following a dubious free-kick awarded on the edge of the penalty area.

But as he has done many times in Australia's top flight, Zwaanswijk rose highest to nod past Grampus custodian Seigo Narazaki to score his seventh goal in all competitions in this campaign.

Indeed, Gosford's idyllic bayside arena was the perfect stage for a highly entertaining match between the AFC Champions League Group G rivals.

And, despite both goals coming in the first 30 minutes of play, the remaining 60 minutes of the game proved fantastic fare as both teams looked to gain their first win of Asia's top club tournament in 2012.

Troy Hearfield, Tomas Rogic, Oliver Bozanic and Mustafa Amini all forced the highly experienced Grampus 'keeper Narazaki into sublime saves to keep the score level.

Meanwhile, Mariners custodian Mathew Ryan was as alert as he frustrated Sho-



Patrick Zwaanswijk heads home for the Mariners. Photo: KAREN DOUGLAS

Match Details

Central Coast Mariners 1 (Zwaanswijk 28')

Nagoya Grampus 1 (Tulio Tanaka 21')

Crowd: 5,130

Sam Gallagher

Yellow Cards: Rogic

Red Cards: Nil

Central Coast Mariners: 1. Mathew Ryan (Gk), 3. Joshua Rose, 4. Pedj Bojic, 6. Patrick Zwaanswijk, 7. John Hutchinson, 11. Oliver Bozanic, 12. Troy Hearfield (9. Bernie Ibini 72'), 14. Michael McGlinchey, 17. Tomas Rogic (2. Daniel McBreen 78'), 18. Alex Wilkinson (C), 22. Mustafa Amini

Substitutes Not Used: 10. Adriano Pellegrino, 16. Trent Sainsbury, 19. John Sutton, 20. Justin Pasfield (Gk), 21.

hei Abe with a spectacular diving save in the 37th minute. Largely untroubled in the second stanza, Ryan looked poised and confident all match on his home patch.

After the game, Mariners Head Coach Graham Arnold said he was delighted with his teams' effort against one of Asia's most respected football clubs.

"I cannot be prouder," he said. "We had four or five kids out there, 18, 19-year-olds and they were superb."

"We challenged the kids tonight and they came through with flying colours."

Arnold also shared with the media gathered at the post match press conference his personal desire to excel in the AFC Champions League.

"Adelaide were brilliant last night and we wanted to put on a good performance to show everyone why we're sitting where we are on the league and that we're worth it," he said.

"It mattered to me because ... people talk about the A-League but we're playing against a 50 million dollar team and want to prove something."

"We had probably the best chance of the game (to win it). Fantastic performance."

With Korea's Seongnam Ilwha Chunma drawing 1-1 with Tianjin Teda in Group G's other clash on Wednesday evening, all four teams in the section are now locked on two points from two matches.

Group G Standings											
Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts			
1 NAGOYA	2	0	2	0	3	3	0	2			
2 CHUNMA	2	0	2	0	3	3	0	2			
3 MARINER	2	0	2	0	1	1	0	2			
4 TIANJIN	2	0	2	0	1	1	0	2			

ACL WRAP

Beijing Guoan 1
Brisbane Roar 1

Adelaide United became the first Australian side to defeat Japanese powerhouse Gamba Osaka with a 2-0 win in the AFC Champions League on Tuesday.

A first-half brace from an unlikely source, defender Daniel Mullen, ensured Adelaide broke Gamba's long standing record against Australian opposition and created history.

Mullen put Adelaide ahead on 17 minutes with a close-range header after his first rocketed off the bar.

The 22-year-old then capped off a classy performance at full-back with another close finish four minutes later.

The win lifts Adelaide into top spot in Group E on six points, three clear of Uzbekistan's Bunyodkor, who earned their first points of the campaign with a 2-0 away victory over South Korean side Pohang Steelers, who also have three points.

Lutfulla Turayev and Kamoliddin Murzoev were on target for the visitors at Steelyard Stadium.

Elsewhere on Tuesday, Brisbane Roar defended stoically to earn their first ever AFC Champions League point with a 1-1 draw away to Beijing Guoan.

Beijing's Piao Cheng stormed forward to score at the near post of Roar goalkeeper Michael Theoklitos on eight minutes.

But an historic equaliser from Mitch Nichols 12 minutes later - the Roar's first goal in the competition - levelled the affair and Brisbane held on to remain in touch with Group F leaders Tokyo and Ulsan (both on four points).

Earlier, South Korean side Ulsan held Tokyo to a 2-2 draw away at the National Olympic Stadium in Japan.

The hosts led through a Yuhei Tokunaga goal on 37 minutes, before a flurry of goals in the final 10 minutes saw the game sway back and forth.

Seung-Yong Kim equalised in the 81st minute, but Tokyo quickly reinstated their lead via Yohei Kajiyama two minutes later.

Not to be denied, Ulsan stole a point in the 89th minute when Brazilian substitute Maranhao equalised once more to leave the two sides level at the top of the group.

United Arab Emirates club Bani Yas came from behind to secure a 1-1 draw away to Uzbek outfit Pakhtakor in Group B.

Al-Ittihad, however, climbed above the UAE side to take the lead in the group when they beat Al Arabi 3-1 away in Doha, with Naif Hazazi scoring a brace for the victors.

Al Jazira went top of Group A after they held off a fast-finishing Al Rayyan 3-2.

The UAE club led 3-0 and were cruising, but their Qatari opponents made it a one-goal game with 10 minutes remaining before the hosts in Abu Dhabi clinched a crucial three points.

In the other Group A clash, Esteghlal were held to a 0-0 draw at home by Nasaf - the latter's first point in the group.

Uzbeks Esteghlal are unbeaten in the tournament on four points after two games.

Group F Standings											
Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts			
1 TOKYO	2	1	1	0	4	2	2	4			
2 HYUNDAI	2	1	1	0	4	3	1	4			
3 BEIJING	2	0	1	1	2	3	-1	1			
4 ROAR	2	0	1	1	1	3	-2	1			

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Goal! Weekly - Friday 23rd March 2012

Greek Champs Olympiakos head to Oz

Perennial Greek Champions and the team regarded as the greatest club in Greek football history, Olympiakos, will make a long awaited visit to Australia in May.

In an exclusive one-off game against the Hyundai A-League's most popular team, Melbourne Victory, Olympiakos will grace Etihad Stadium on Saturday, May 19 at 7.30pm (closed roof) following the completion of the Greek Superleague in April.

A huge crowd is expected at Etihad Stadium with Olympiakos' first visit to Australia since 1978 sure to raise excitement levels among Melbourne's enormous Greek community.

Olympiakos has committed to bringing a full strength squad that will include five current Greek internationals, that will feature in the national team during the upcoming 'Euro's' in June.

Among the Greek internationals to feature in the Olympiakos line up will be exciting right back Vasilios Torosidis, left back Jose Holebas, central defender Avram Papadopoulos, defensive midfielder Yiannis Maniatis and Greek attacking prodigy, Yiannis Fetfatidis.

In addition, the Olympiakos squad will feature international players like leading goal scorer and excitement machine Kevin Mirallas (Belgium), fellow striker Rafik Djebbour (Algeria), Sweden captain Olaf Mellberg, forward Kazim Richards (Turkey), midfielder David Fuster (Spain), Serbian star striker Marko Pantelic, midfield playmaker Ariel Ibayasa (Argentina), Former Manchester United Goalkeeper Roy Carroll (Ireland), Ivan Marcano (Spain), and Cameroon midfielder Makoun.

Olympiakos is currently 7 points clear in the current Greek Superleague and is heading for its third straight title, its eighth in the last 10 years. Olympiakos has also qualified for the Greek FA cup semi finals and recently reached the last 16 stage of the prestigious Europa



Opa! Olympiakos will visit for the first time since 1978 and play Melbourne Victory.

League. As of mid-March, the club boasted the best attacking record in Europe, as well as the best defensive statistics having conceded an average of just under 0.50 goals per game. Australian Tour Promoter John Denison of Entourage Football stated, "This is an exciting international football event that will feature one of the best supported clubs in the world. It has been rumoured for many years that Olympiakos will be making the trek down under, well now it's a reality and we expect a lot of Greek expats to rejoice – so much so that we expect a huge turnout at Etihad Stadium on Saturday May 19 when Olympiakos clash with Australia's best supported club in Melbourne Victory, making for an electric atmosphere."

Olympiakos President Mr Evangelos Marinakis commented, "It is an honour

for our club to finally make the visit to Australia – we hope to further promote our club to the thousands of Greek expats in Australia and entertain them with our special brand of attacking football – we are rejoicing and cannot wait to bring joy to the throng of our supporters."

Olympiakos Captain, Avram Papadopoulos, went on to say, "It's with much joy and anticipation that we make the trip to Melbourne – we have heard that there are thousands of Olympiakos fans in Australia waiting to see our team in action and we will not disappoint them."

Melbourne Victory Managing Director, Richard Wilson was equally as pleased to be hosting another international opponent, "This is another coup for our football club. Olympiakos is one of the

most famous clubs in Europe and it is a privilege for our players to take on such a profiled club, and again introduce our brand, and the Melbourne Victory experience, to more football followers."

Etihad Stadium CEO, Ian Collins, said the announcement that Olympiakos will play a one-off game against Melbourne Victory further cements Etihad Stadium's credentials as a venue for world class events.

"Olympiakos has built a reputation over many years as one of the world's great football clubs and we will be privileged to host such an iconic sporting institution at our venue," Mr Collins said.

"In recent years, we have helped to showcase the sport in Australia hosting Juventus, David Beckham's LA Galaxy, the English Premier League's Fulham, as well as a number of internationals

involving the Socceroos."

"With such a large and passionate Greek sporting community in Victoria, we are confident that the event will attract a fantastic attendance," Mr Collins said.

Given the expected interest in the event, organisers have encouraged fans to purchase tickets early in order to avoid disappointment.

Tickets will go on sale via Ticketmaster on Wednesday, March 28 at 9am. Tickets start from \$20 and also feature a variety of VIP fan packages, including the opportunity to meet the players at a specially organised training session at Etihad Stadium on Friday May 18.

The Match

Melbourne Victory v Olympiakos
Saturday 19th May
Etihad Stadium
KO 7.30pm

Ticket Details

Ultimate Olympiakos Fan Package (including exclusive training session): \$150
Platinum ticket: \$80 (plus fees and charges)
Gold ticket: \$60 / Concession: \$50 (plus fees and charges)
Silver Ticket \$45 / Concession: \$35 (plus fees and charges)
Olympiakos Gate 7 (Behind goal and Active Area): \$30 / Concession: \$20
Melbourne Victory (Behind goal and Active Area): \$30 / Concession: \$20

Olympiakos Squad

Goalkeepers: Roy Carroll, Lajos Megjéri
Defenders: Vasilios Torosidis, Jose Holebas, Avraam Papadopoulos, Olaf Mellberg, Ivan Marcano, Tassos Papazoglou, Franco Modesto
Midfielders: Yiannis Maniatis, Ariel Ibayasa, Jean Makoun, Pablo Orbaith, David Fuster, Djamel Abdoun, Feisa
Forwards: Kevin Mirallas, Kazim Richards, Yiannis Fetfatidis, Marco Pantelic, Rafik Djebbour, Diogo
(*2 to be omitted)

SHORT PASSES

PHOENIX TO KICK OFF FINALS FOOTBALL

Wellington Phoenix will kick off the 2011-12 Hyundai A-League final series at Westpac Stadium on Friday March 30.

While their opponents won't be known till the regular season ends on Sunday, the Phoenix are guaranteed a home game as they can finish no lower than fourth spot on the table.

The game will kick off at 8pm and Phoenix head coach Ricki Herbert is forecasting a spectacular evening.

"Night games under lights are fantastic, especially when there is a big crowd," Herbert said.

"Anyone who was at the All Whites' World Cup qualifier against Bahrain will testify to that fact, and I'm looking forward to a good turnout of fans in the finals, whoever our opponents are."

"The last time we played at home in the finals around 60,000 fans watched our matches against Perth and Newcastle and will tell you what thrillers they were."

"There is nothing quite like finals football and I can't wait for it to start."

Firstly however the Phoenix must finish their regular season against competition leaders Central Coast Mariners at Westpac Stadium on Sunday.

Mariners need a win to ensure they will finish top of the ladder with second-placed Brisbane Roar favourites to take three points from Gold Coast United later in the day.

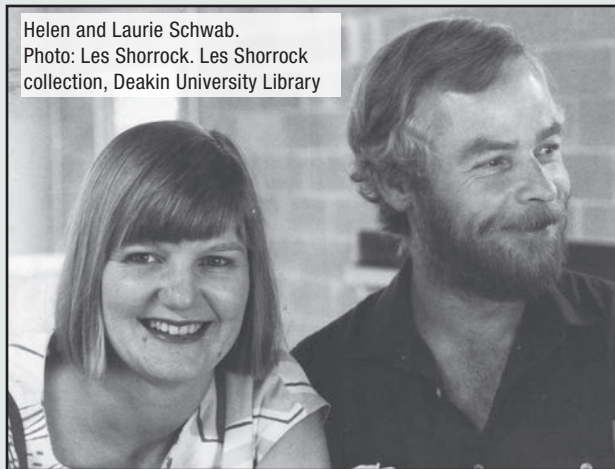
While guaranteed fourth place, the Phoenix will know what they need to do to get up to third with Perth Glory playing Melbourne Victory in Perth on Saturday.

Should Perth lose, a draw against the Mariners would be enough to push the Phoenix up to third place, while a Perth draw and a Wellington win would have the same outcome.

Helen Schwab

It is with deep sadness and regret that we pass on the news that Helen Schwab tragically drowned while swimming in Queensland. Helen was a vibrant and independent spirit who was married to journalist Laurie Schwab until his untimely death. She helped preserve Laurie's commitment to the future of the game and of soccer journalism through the Laurie Schwab foundation, which is now under the auspices of Football Federation Victoria. Helen worked as an editor, designer and writer for a number of magazines and publications. She was the most lively and entertaining company, committed to her children, and always available to help any worthwhile project. She will be sadly missed by all those connected with the game.

Advice about the funeral will be in the Herald Sun today (Friday).



Helen and Laurie Schwab.
Photo: Les Shorrock. Les Shorrock collection, Deakin University Library

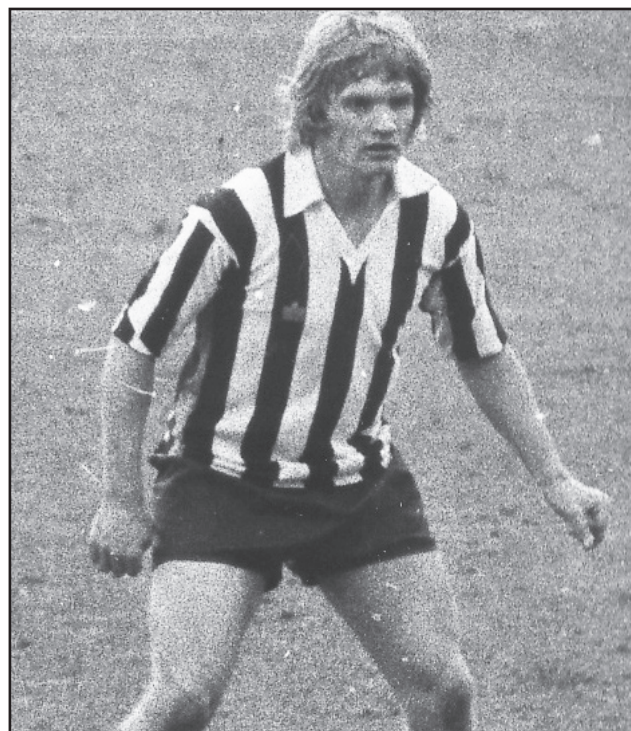
Vale Ian Marshall (12 February 1949-13 March 2012)

By Roy Hay

Ian Marshall died on 13 March 2012 in Christchurch, New Zealand after a long battle with cancer. Ian was a key member of the South Melbourne Hellas midfield in the 1970s, playing alongside Jimmy Armstrong, Peter Bourne, John Bedford and Steve Walker.

He helped South Melbourne to the State League championship in 1972 and 1974. He was selected in an Australian squad but did not take the field in an international match. From Hellas he joined Juventus and then went to New Zealand, from where his wife, Christine, hailed.

Ian Marshall was born in Ross-shire in Scotland and started his senior career with the local club Ross County in Dingwall. He was spotted by Tommy Docherty when he was managing Chelsea and the ebullient Scottish manager intended to take the young man to London. However a serious leg injury kept Marshall out of the game for some time. By the time he was back on the top line, Docherty had left Chelsea so the big move never



Ian Marshall in action for Juventus.

came about, and Ian Marshall played for some time with Rotherham under Docherty. In 1970, however, he made an even bigger move, when he was recruited by South Melbourne. Marshall and Peter Bourne hit it off in the midfield and Laurie Schwab in 1972 wrote, they 'look and play as if they were brothers' knocking off league leader George Cross at Middle Park in front of 11,000 fans and rarely allowing their opponents John Gardiner and Kevin Walker a sniff of the ball. South won that game four-nil. The arrival of Jimmy Mackay from Sydney in 1975 probably limited Marshall's opportunities and he moved on. At Juventus he played with Jim Armstrong, Jack Reilly and Pat Della Rocca. In New Zealand he continued to play and coach and was involved with the national team, the All Whites. He was an inaugural inductee into the South Melbourne Hall of Fame.

He is survived by his wife Christine, son Callum and twin daughters Alana and Vanessa.

I am indebted to Robert Levene and Jim Armstrong for assistance with this tribute.

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2011 VICTORIA'S NUMBER ONE SUPPLIER OF NIKE TEAMWEAR

SCOREBOARD

TABLE	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
1 Central Coast Mariners	26	14	6	6	38	23	15	48
2 Brisbane Roar	26	13	7	6	48	27	21	46
3 Perth Glory	26	12	4	10	36	33	3	40
4 Wellington Phoenix	26	12	4	10	33	30	3	40
5 Melbourne Heart	26	9	9	8	34	33	1	36
6 Newcastle Jets	26	10	5	11	36	38	-2	35
7 Sydney FC	26	9	8	9	34	40	-6	35
8 Melbourne Victory	26	6	11	9	33	39	-6	29
9 Adelaide United	26	5	9	12	25	43	-18	24
10 Gold Coast United	26	4	9	13	29	40	-11	21

THIS WEEK	Final Round	Fixture	Venue	Local	AEDT
	Fri 23 Mar 2012	Adelaide United v Melbourne Heart	Hindmarsh Stadium	7:30pm	8:00pm
	Sat 24 Mar 2012	Perth Glory v Melbourne Victory	nib Stadium	6:30pm	9:30pm
	Sun 25 Mar 2012	Wellington Phoenix v Central Coast Mariners	Westpac Stadium	4:00pm	2:00pm
	Sun 25 Mar 2012	Sydney FC v Newcastle Jets	Sydney Football Stadium	4:00pm	4:00pm
	Sun 25 Mar 2012	Gold Coast United v Brisbane Roar	Skilled Park	5:30pm	6:30pm

NEXT WEEK	Finals Series :
	Week 1 (30 March-1 April)
	Week 2 (6-8 April)
	Week 3 (13-15 April)
	Week 4 Grand Final (Sun 22 April 2012)

ROUND 26 RESULTS

Melbourne Victory 3 (Hernandez 11, Cernak 58, Jeggo 89) Wellington Phoenix 0 Crowd: 11,231 at AAMI Park	Melbourne Heart 2 (Dugandzic, 31, Babalj, 36) Sydney FC 2 (Cole, 66, 77) Crowd: 7,498 at AAMI Park
Gold Coast United 3 (Anderson 6, Brown 83, 90) Perth Glory 0 Crowd: Approximately 2000 at Skilled Park, Robina	Newcastle Jets 1 (Abbas 40) Brisbane Roar 2 (Berisha 14, Nichols 81p) Crowd 11,471 at Hunter Stadium
	Central Coast Mariners 1 (Ibini 47') Adelaide United 0 Crowd: 7275 at Bluetongue Stadium

TOP GOAL SCORERS

19 - Besart Berisha (Roar)
9 - Shane Smeltz (Glory; Jeremy Brockie (Jets), Ryan Griffiths (Jets), Mitch Nichols (Roar), Carlos Hernandez (Victory),
8 - Harry Kewell (Victory), Eli Bablj (Heart),
7- Bruno Cazarine (SFC), Matt Simon (Mariners), Archie Thompson (Victory), Paul Ifill (Phoenix)



Eli Babalj was once again on target for the Heart, this time in the 2-2 draw with Sydney FC.

A-LEAGUE TEAM OF THE WEEK ROUND 26

Compiled by Steven Talevski



GK: Jerrad Tyson – The Gold Coast United goal-keeper kept a clean sheet to help his side pick up their first win since Boxing Day.

RB: Shannon Cole – A half-time substitute for Sydney FC against the Heart, he proved to be the key man in their impressive comeback as the full back bagged an unlikely two goals to hand Sydney a point as they prepare for their must win clash against the Newcastle Jets.

CB: Zac Anderson – The young Gold Coast defender scored his first A-League goal with a terrific header while also keeping a clean sheet in his side's victory against the Glory.

CB: Mark Milligan – After making last week's team of the week as a central midfielder, Milligan slots in the centre of defence after Jim Magilton moved to Socceroo into defence as the Victory kept a clean sheet against finals contenders Wellington.

LB: Adama Traore – After the announcement of his signing for the Melbourne Victory next season, Adama Traore was back in Gold as he kept the Perth left wing and attack relatively quite as the Gold Coast picked up a win leading into their final game against rivals Brisbane Roar.

RM: Mate Dugandzic – Dugandzic was able to impact another game with a well finished volley before he set up the Hearts second in their two all draw that

ensured them their passage to the finals for the first time in the clubs history.

CM: Carlos Hernandez – The question of will he stay or will he leave is on everyone's mind but the Costa Rican showed why all the fuss is about with a stunning strike from outside the penalty area.

CM: James Brown – Brown was one of two players to come off the bench to score a double for their team this week. Brown comfortably slotted his first goal 16 minutes after coming on before he hit a tremendous free kick in injury time to help Gold Coast to a three nil victory over Perth.

LM: Ali Abbas – The now Australian citizen and six time Iraqi international was a dangerous threat in attack for the Jets as he scored a wonderful free kick to hand Newcastle an equaliser in their 2-1 defeat to Brisbane Roar.

ST: Archie Thompson – Thompson may be struggling to find the back of the net as of late but he sure was influential as he played a part in all three of Melbourne Victory's goals against Wellington.

ST: Eli Babalj – The twenty year old forward continues to work hard for his side in both attack and defence and was rewarded with a goal to help his side into the finals.

Star Man

Carlos Hernandez
Melbourne Victory



The Costa Rican international was in fine form against the Phoenix as he unleashed one of his specialities with a spectacular strike from outside the penalty area. Hernandez's performance led fans to pressure the club into announcing that they have in fact begun negotiations to sign the midfielder beyond his current contract which is set to end on April 30. Whether he will, or won't be in a Victory shirt next season, fans across the country will be disappointed if this is the last we see of the Former Johnny Warren medallist beyond this weekend.

Thank God It's Friday... **GW is now available at all good newsagents every Friday**
Also available at Heart & Victory & Jets & Adelaide home games



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Melbourne Heart

HEART



2

Sydney FC



2

Match Details

Melbourne Heart 2 (Mate Dugandzic 31', Eli Babalj 36')

Sydney FC 2 (Shannon Cole 66', 77')

Venue: AAMI Park

Referee: Strebre Delovski

Attendance: 7,498

Melbourne Heart: 1. Clint Bolton, 2. Michael Marrone, 4. Simon Colosimo, 5. Fred, 6. Matt Thompson, 10. Wayne Shroji, 13. Jonatan Germano (17. Jason Hoffman 69'), 16. Aziz Behich, 18. Curtis Good, 19. Eli Babalj, 23. Mate Dugandzic (11. Alex Terra 75')

Unused substitutes: 3. Brendan Hamill, 30. Sebastian Mattei

Yellow cards: Wayne Shroji 71'

Red cards: Nil

Sydney FC: 20. Ivan Necevski, 4. Pascal Bosschaart (2 Sebastian Ryall 61'), 5. Michael Beauchamp, 7. Brett Emerton, 9. Bruno Cazarine (19. Mark Bridge 81'), 10. Nick Carle, 15. Terry McFlynn, 16. Joel Chianese, 17. Terry Antonis, 21. Scott Jamieson, 23. Rhyan Grant (12. Shannon Cole 46')

Unused substitutes: 1. Liam Reddy,

Yellow cards: Nil

Red cards: Nil

Finals for Heart as SFC clings to hope

By David Mason

Two goals from Shannon Cole has helped Sydney FC snatch a come-back 2-2 draw with Melbourne Heart tonight, which has set up a huge final round shoot out with the Newcastle Jets at Allianz Stadium next Sunday.

Sydney FC must defeat Newcastle in Sydney next Sunday to snare the final place in the semi finals.

The come-from-behind victory over Melbourne Heart, who led 2-0 at half time, gives Sydney FC a huge amount of confidence going into the season-defining match.

Sydney FC made one change to the team that ended Melbourne Victory's season with a 1-0 win last week, as Terry Antonis replaced the suspended Karol Kisel and Cole was promoted to the bench.

Sydney FC and Melbourne Heart had a boost before kick off as the Newcastle Jets suffered a 2-1 loss to Brisbane, meaning 5th place was up for grabs at AAMI Park. It also meant that Sydney FC's semi finals future would be decided next Sunday at Allianz Stadium, no matter what the result against Melbourne Heart.

Both teams started cautiously, with pole position in the race for the semi finals up for grabs, although Melbourne had a header flash across goal and Cazarine fashioned a tight chance with a neat turn inside the first 10 minutes.

The chances were few and far between throughout the first half as the match was developing into a midfield battle but it was the home side that opened the scoring in the 31st minute after a neat flick and chip from Fred released Mate Dugandzic and he slotted the ball under Ivan Necevski.

Five minutes later Melbourne doubled their lead when Eli Babalj nodded home a deflected cross after a quick Melbourne counter attack saw the home side get in behind Sydney FC's left-sided defence.



M	Match Stats	
5	Saves	3
8	Attempts on target	10
6	Attempts off target	11
52%	Possession	48%
6	Corners	3
0	Offsides	3
13	Fouls committed	15

The Heart are off to the perfect start thanks to Mate Dugandzic's opener. Photo: DANIEL FLIS

The two goals came at a time when Melbourne Heart took control of the match with some individual brilliance and they managed to take the 2-0 lead into the half time break.

Sydney FC made a change at half time with Cole coming into the game for Rhyan Grant at right back, which turned out to be an inspired substitution.

The Sky Blues came out of the sheds on fire and came close in the 52nd minute when Nick Carle smashed a shot against the crossbar and Cazarine's well struck shot on the rebound was plucked out of the air by Clint Bolton.

Bolton had to make another save in the 57th minute, this time slightly more regulation when Carle lashed another shot towards the Heart goal.

The Sky Blues suffered a blow in the 65th minute when Pascal Bosschaart was forced off with a tight hamstring but it made no difference to the Sydney FC resurgence when Cole popped up in the penalty area to thrash home a loose ball to make it 2-1 less than a minute later.

Necevski kept Sydney FC in the game when he denied Fred with a great one-on-one save in the 76th minute as the

Sky Blues were left short at the back as they poured forward looking for an equaliser.

A minute later Sydney FC was level when Cole scored his second goal off the bench when he snuck into the near post to head home a pin-point Scott Jamieson free kick in the 77th minute.

The game opened right up at this stage and Necevski was again called into action to deny Fred in the 79th minute.

Emerton had the next chance after Sydney FC broke quickly, Terry McFlynn played Emerton into space but his shot from an acute angle flashed

across the goal.

The last 10 minutes saw Sydney FC throwing numbers forward in pursuit of all three points as Melbourne Heart seemed content with the draw, which assured them of finals football.

In the end it was a good performance from Sydney FC, especially the second half, and the season will come down to next Sunday.

Sydney FC and Newcastle Jets will now face off for the 6th and final place in the playoffs in a huge game at Allianz Stadium (formerly Sydney Football Stadium) next Sunday. Kick off is 4pm.



With travelling Cove fans spurring him on, Shannon Cole keeps Sydney FC in the finals hunt for at least another round. Photo: DANIEL FLIS



Clint Bolton can only dive in vain as Shannon Cole's equaliser finds the back of the net. Photo: DANIEL FLIS

BE A PART OF MELBOURNE'S HEART

CC Mariners**1****Adelaide United****0**

Match Details

Central Coast Mariners 1

(Ibini 47')

Adelaide United 0

Referee: Ben Williams

Venue: Bluetongue Stadium

Crowd: 7,275

Central Coast Mariners: 1. Mathew Ryan, 3. Joshua Rose, 4. Pedj Bojic, 6. Patrick Zwaanswijk, 7. John Hutchinson, 9. Bernie Ibini (12. Troy Hearfield 82'), 11. Oliver Bozanic, 12. Troy Hearfield, 14. Michael McGlinchey, 18. Alex Wilkinson (C), 19. John Sutton (23. Adam Kwasnik 66'), 22. Mustafa Amini (17. Tomas Rogic 88')

Subs Not Used: 20. Justin Pasfield

Yellow Cards: None

Red Cards: None

Adelaide United: 1. Eugene Galekovic, 2. Osama Malik (15. Jacob Melling 66'), 3. Nigel Boogaard, 4. Jonathan McKain, 7. Zenon Caravella, 10. Dario Vidosic, 11. Bruce Djite (9. Sergio Van Dijk 55'), 12. Antony Golec, 17. Iain Ramsay (14. Cameron Watson 50'), 21. Francisco Usucar

Subs Not Used: 20. Mark Birighitti

Yellow Cards: Golec, Caravella,

Galekovic, Boogaard

Red Cards: None

By Adrian Deans

The last time Adelaide came to Bluetongue they played great football. They did their homework on closing down the Mariners' usual attacking channels – led twice but got pipped in injury time after sitting back to protect their lead in the second half. What would they learn from that experience, and how would they go against a team showing signs of the death wobbles as the Premier's Plate looms within reach?

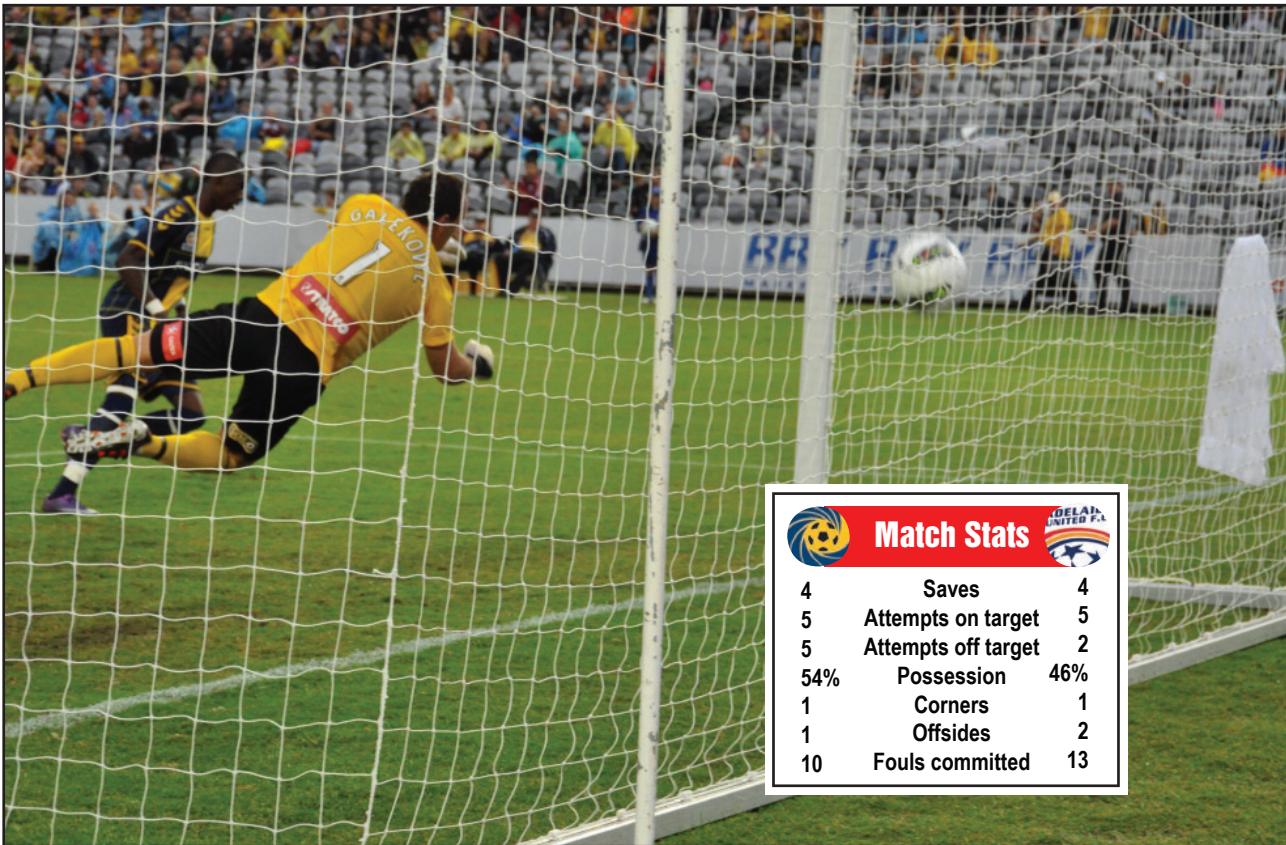
The Mariners have not been playing well in recent times – whether that is explained by the departure of Rostyn Griffiths or the general choke effect of impending success – who can tell? But Brisbane aren't letting up and the Mariners will have to explore whole new frontiers of resolve if they are to pip the Roar.

We saw some of that resolve against Adelaide. The Reds have had an inexplicable season – a great team on paper, they were expected to be among the challengers this year. But after a forgettable season, they had an excellent result in Tashkent in the Asian Champions League then followed that up with a great performance against Brisbane at Suncorp, and probably should have won.

Second last? How did they manage that on this kind of form? Adelaide had finally awoken and premier pretenders from Gosford looked like appetising fare for a team discovering its strength and girding itself for another major assault on the ACL. They were definitely not the sort of 'second-last' opponent the Mariners needed to face while desperately keeping their noses ahead of Brisbane.

The match began with the Mariners maintaining most of the possession but with Adelaide looking dangerous on the counter. Zenon Caravella is really starting to play well and he was pulling the strings – releasing Ramsey and Vidosic through both inside and outside channels. Despite the weight of possession, the Reds were creating the better chances and in the 14th minute, Mat Ryan needed every one of his 181 centimetres to tip Nigel Boogaard's header over.

Around the 30 minute mark, the Reds started to wrest control of possession away from the Mariners with Golec, McKain and Caravella enjoying plenty of time on the ball and in the 36th minute Djite set up Vidosic



Bernie Ibini is on hand to score and the Mariners are a step closer to claiming the Premier's Plate.

Photo: KAREN DOUGLAS

in plenty of space but he blasted over when he could have slipped the ball back to Djite for a tap in.

As the half wore down, it was mostly the Reds looking comfortable, although right at the death it was the Mariners that nearly broke the deadlock. Bernie Ibini was put in behind the Reds' defence by Ollie Bozanic but confronted with the options of passing or shooting, he did neither and hit a hard ball across the face to no-one.

At half time, the Mariners would have known it was honours even between Brisbane and Newcastle, which meant if it stayed that way, the Mariners would be Premiers with a win.

That was enough incentive to inspire a special effort and straight after half time the Mariners went ahead. Another superb long ball from Patrick Zwaanswijk picked out Pedj Bojic who was lucky to retain possession but then redeemed himself with a driven cross to Bernie Ibini on the far post. All of a sudden, if nothing changed, the Mariners would claim the Premier's Plate (which was teasingly on display at half time).

For some reason, the Reds went into their shells for most of the second half and, just like last time the Reds were in town, they allowed Rose and Bojic to dominate the wide spaces which meant the lion's share of possession and long periods of pressure

around the Adelaide goal.

For all that, there were few further clear cut chances for either team – although the Mariners nearly blew it at the death. Alex Wilkinson dithered on the ball and Dario Vidosic nipped in to claim possession but, once again, Mat Ryan was quick off his line to save the day. Ryan had another excellent game featuring some robust aerial challenges. He gets criticised for being on the short side (as keepers go) but he dominates his box better than plenty of taller keepers I could mention.

In the Red corner, Francisco Usucar had one of his better games, although John Kosmina should let him know that hair pulling

is frowned upon in this country.

For the best part of 40 minutes the Mariners were the 2011/12 A-League Premiers, but Brisbane scored against Newcastle with a late penalty to send the competition into a final week. What is it about Brisbane and penalties and the emptiness of the Mariners' trophy cabinet?

Adrian Deans is the author of Mr Cleansheets – published by Vulgar Press, distributed by Dennis Jones and Associates and available in all good book stores. ebook also available at www.mrcleansheets.com



Anthony Golec is the last man standing as Iain Ramsay falls to the ground.

Photo: KAREN DOUGLAS



Pedj Bojic displays composure as Osama Malik shadows.

Photo: KAREN DOUGLAS

Newcastle Jets



1

Brisbane Roar



2

Match Details

Newcastle Jets 1 (Ali Abbas 40')
Brisbane Roar 2 (Besart Berisha 13', Mitch Nichols (P) 81')
At Hunter Stadium
Referee: Jared Gillett
Crowd: 11,471

Newcastle Jets: 1. Ben Kennedy (Gk), 4. Nikolai Topor-Stanley, 5. Tiago Calvano (25. Jacob Pepper 85') 6. Ben Kantarovski, 8. Jeremy Brockie, 10. Ruben Zadkovich, 11. Tarek Elrich (23. Ryan Griffiths 57') 12. Jobe Wheelhouse (C), 13. Byun Sung-Hwan, 22. Ali Abbas, 24. Francis Jeffers (9. Michael Bridges 76')
Substitutes Not Used: 40. Matthew Nash (Gk)

Yellow Cards: Byun Sung Hwan 47', Zadkovich 83'
Red Cards: Nil

Brisbane Roar: 1. Michael Theoklitos (Gk), 2. Matt Smith, 4. Matt Jurman, 5. Ivan Franjic, 6. Erik Paartalu, 7. Besart Berisha, 10. Henrique, 11. Issey Nakajima-Farran (21. James Meyer 71') 17. Mitch Nichols (8. Massimo Muroccca) 19. Jack Hingert (12. Matt Mundy 68') 22. Thomas Broich

Substitutes Not Used: 20. Andrew Redmayne (Gk)
Yellow Cards: Hingert 63', Smith 77'
Red Cards: Nil

Roar makes Jets Pay the Penalty

By Shaun Dyas

The Brisbane Roar has defeated the Newcastle Jets 2-1 in a pulsating A-League clash in front of 11,471 fans at Hunter Stadium.

The Roar were by far the better side for much of the contest but needed a Mitch Nichols penalty in the 81st minute to eventually subdue the spirited hosts, after Henrique had earlier missed a penalty after a Tiago Calvano foul.

The Brazilian defender was again the guilty culprit as he slid in to stop Roar midfielder Erik Paartalu who would have been clear through on goal until the Brazilian's illegal intervention. Nichols was the coolest man inside the stadium as he placed his penalty past Jets keeper Ben Kennedy, silencing the Novocastrian faithful in the process.

Earlier, Ali Abbas had the opportunity to open the scoring in the 8th minute. Englishman Francis Jeffers released the winger with a neat pass into the edge of the area. The former Iraqi under 23 international smashed a left footed drive agonisingly wide of the left hand upright of Michael Theoklitos.

Two minutes later and Jeremy Brockie should have put the home side in front. The Jets moved the ball from deep inside their own half before Abbas again found himself free on the left. He bent in a cross which found the Kiwi in space at the far post but he shot straight at Theoklitos who smothered the ball behind for a corner.

Newcastle was made to pay for their wastefulness on 13 minutes. The familiar combination of Thomas Broich and Besart Berisha combined and the Albanian made no mistake as he poked his shot past the advancing Kennedy from 15 yards. The home side complained immediately to the referee's assistant for offside and they had a point as replays showed the Brisbane Striker was offside.

Brisbane started to completely dominate the contest and were unlucky not to increase their lead in the 21st minute. Henrique was on the end of some slick Brisbane passing and found himself one-on-one with Kennedy. His shot beat the Jets keeper before rebounding of both



Besart Berisha receives some Novocastrian hospitality after opening the scoring for Roar. Photo: BEN NEVILLE

posts and somehow back into the keeper's grateful arms.

A minute later they unbelievably hit the post again. A ball was sprayed out to Henrique wide on the left and he controlled instantly before squaring the ball for an unmarked Berisha. His first time shot from 12 yards hit the base of Kennedy's left post. In all honesty the Roar should have been comfortably in front by this stage.

Newcastle made the Roar pay for their misses in front of goal in the 40th minute. Ali Abbas scored a sublime free kick from 25 yards after Paartalu had committed a foul on Jeffers. The Iraqi left Theoklitos with no chance as he bent the ball su-

perbly over the wall and past the helpless keeper. The response from the home fans was pure ecstasy and they somehow managed to get to the break at 1-1.

Brisbane should have extended their lead three minutes after the interval. Nichols, who was stamping his authority on the contest, played an inch perfect pass to the feet of Issey Nakajima Farran. He sent in a first time cross straight onto the head of Berisha who uncharacteristically headed over from six yards with the goal gaping.

The Jets slowly started to edge their way into the contest and the Roar had their keeper to thank in the 59th minute for keeping the score line level. Newcastle

again broke swiftly with Jeffers feeding substitute Ryan Griffiths on the edge of the area. He evaded two defenders before hitting a right foot strike that Theoklitos parried directly into the path of the advancing Jeffers. He side footed from six yards at the empty goal but the Roar keeper threw every sinew of his body at the ball and amazingly tipped the ball over the bar. The save was quite simply world class.

Theoklitos again saved the day in the 73rd minute. The Jets had managed to keep sustained possession in and around the Roar penalty area and captain Jobe Wheelhouse went on a mazy run. He beat two defenders before chipping in a cross

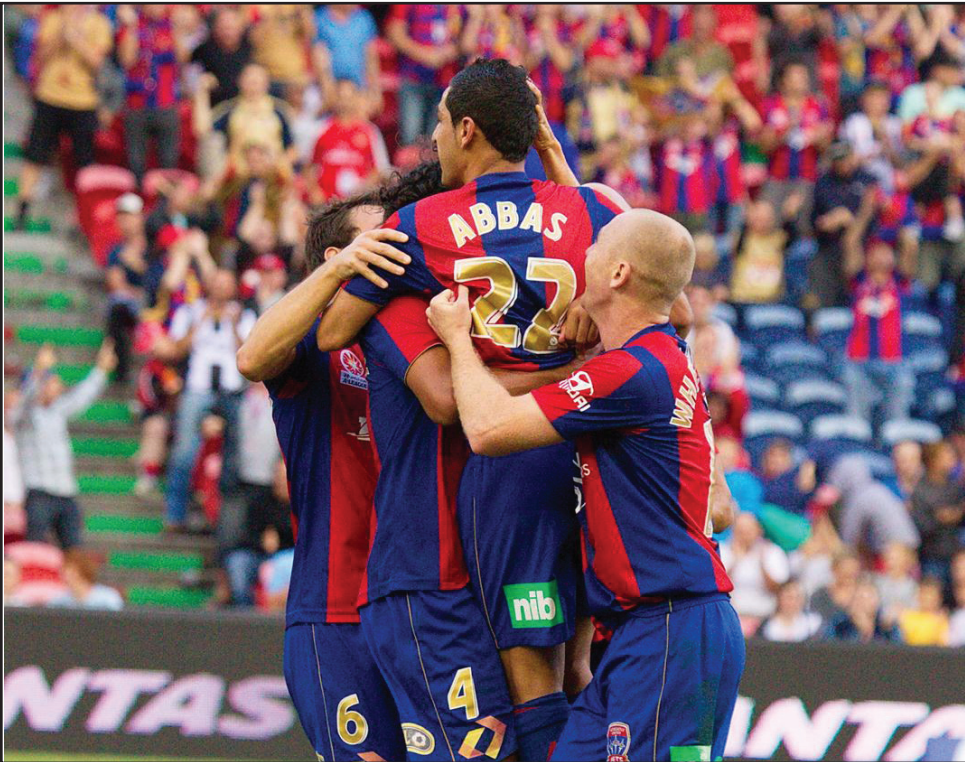
from the left. It deflected and seemed certain to loop over Theoklitos. The keeper had other ideas, producing a magnificent right hand save to paw the ball away from the goal.

It was left to Theoklitos to sum up the Brisbane performance after the match.

"We were kind of unlucky. We were playing great football but it just wouldn't go in for us."

Newcastle travels to Sydney next week in a crucial encounter that will decide the final play off place. The Roar plays Gold Coast in what is likely to be the final game in the A-League for the side from the glitter strip.

	Match Stats	
2	Saves	3
4	Attempts on target	5
5	Attempts off target	3
51%	Possession	49%
4	Corners	3
4	Offsides	6
14	Fouls committed	10



Ali Abbas has the home fans on their feet after levelling terms.

Photo: BEN NEVILLE



Mitch Nichols makes no mistake from the spot to secure all three points and keep the Roar in with a shout of back-to-back Plates. Photo: BEN NEVILLE

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NEWCASTLE UNITED JETS

Gold Coast United**3****Perth Glory****0****Match Details**

Gold Coast United 3 (Anderson 6, Brown 83, 90)

Perth Glory 0
Crowd: Approximately 2000 at Skilled Park, Robina

Gold Coast: 20. J.Tyson, 2.J.Brillante, 3.M.Thwaite, 4.Z.Anderson, 11.J.Baker-Daish, 15.A.Traore, 17.C.Harold, 22.P.Jungschlager, 23.D.McGowen, 28.D.Bowles, 33.M.Cooper.

Subs: 40.C.O'Connor, 10.T.Minniecon, 12.D.MacAllister, 18.J.Brown.

Perth Glory: 1.D.Vukovic, 2.J.Mitchell, 3.B.van den Brink, 4.B.Mehmet, 5.S.Pantelidis, 9.S.Smeltz, 13.T.Dodd, 14.S.McGarry, 19.J.Rishdon, 27.Andrezinho, 35.D.Heffernan.

Subs: 20.N.Young, 17.T.Howarth, 26.B.O'Neill, 28.N.Makeche

By Gareth Morgan

A 10-man Perth Glory have suffered a disappointing 3-0 loss to Gold Coast United at Skilled Park on Sunday to remain third on the Hyundai A-League table.

The Glory had defender Dean Heffernan sent off in the first half and were unable to get anything out of their road trip despite creating several chances.

Shane Smeltz went close on several occasions against one of his former clubs, but a Zachary Anderson header and a late James Brown double helped Gold Coast end their 13-game winless run.

After a scrappy start, it was Gold Coast who took a surprise lead through Anderson.

A curling free-kick from Jake Barker-Daish found the centre-back, who guided his header into the corner and left Danny Vukovic with little chance.

The Glory, on the road after a 1-0 win over the Central Coast Mariners in Perth's searing heat last Sunday, were unable to make a real impact in the opening half-hour.

It got worse for Ian Ferguson's men on 35 minutes when left-back Heffernan was shown a controversial red card.

Referee Kris Griffiths-Jones had no hesitation in sending off Heffernan for an alleged elbow on Daniel Bowles.

The red card sparked the visitors into life, and they were unfortunate not to be on level terms before half-time.



Match Stats		
6	Saves	3
6	Attempts on target	7
7	Attempts off target	3
48%	Possession	52%
5	Corners	10
0	Offsides	0
15	Fouls committed	12

James Brown returned from injury to score a brace in impressive fashion. Photo: ADRIAN GAGLIONE

First, Travis Dodd forced Jerad Tyson into a low save, before Shane Smeltz almost struck from the edge of the area, only to see the shot-stopper tip his drive around the post.

Josh Brillante threatened Vukovic's goal before the break, but it was Glory who were again on the front foot after the restart despite their numerical disadvantage.

A Smeltz header drew Tyson into another save on 54 minutes, while Billy Mehmet would have levelled if his volley had gone either side of the Gold Coast goalkeeper moments later.

Mike Mulvey's men were prepared to concede possession and try to hit the Glory on the break, but Ferguson's defence continued to keep the young and

quick United side at bay.

It was Mehmet who almost struck a stunning equaliser, having his long-range free-kick well-saved by a desperate Tyson with less than a quarter of an hour to play.

The hosts sealed the three points thanks to two Brown strikes.

A Bowles cut-back was mis-hit by Brillante, falling into the path

of Brown to side-foot into the bottom corner for his fifth goal of the campaign in the 83rd minute.

Brown was not finished there, curling a 20-yard free-kick into the bottom corner to complete the scoring in the third minute of additional time.

Perth Glory is still assured a top four finish and a home final when the finals series begins.



Josh Brillante and Steven McGarry vie for the ball.
Photo: ADRIAN GAGLIONE



Gold Coast keeper Jerad Tyson comes off his line to punch clear the danger.
Photo: ADRIAN GAGLIONE

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Melbourne Victory



3

Wellington Phoenix



0

Match Details

Melbourne Victory 3 (Carlos Hernandez 11', Isaka Cernak 58', James Jeggo 90')

Wellington Phoenix 0

Venue: AAMI Park

Attendance: 11,231

Referees: Chris Beath

Melbourne Victory : 1. Tando Velaphi, 2. Matthew Foschini, 3. Fabio, 5. Mark Milligan, 10. Archie Thompson, 11. Marco Rojas (19. Isaka Cernak 19'), 13. Diogo Ferreira, 16. Carlos Hernandez (4. Petar Franjic 90'), 17. Jimmy Jeggo, 22. Harry Kewell (29. Julius Davies 80'), 24. Ubay Luzardo

Unused substitutes: 21. Ante Covic
Yellow cards: Diogo Ferreira 90 + 2'
Red cards: Nil

Wellington Phoenix : 1. Mark Paston, 2. Manny Muscat, 3. Tony Lochhead, 6. Tim Brown, 7. Leo Bertos, 8. Paul Ifill, 9. Chris Greenacre (14. Mirjan Pavlovic 65'), 17. Vince Lia, 18. Ben Sigmund, 21. Dani Sanchez (12. Nicky Ward 71'), 22. Andrew Durante, 24. Alex Smith (7. Leo Bertos 65')

Unused substitutes: 20. Tony Warner
Yellow cards: Vince Lia 25', tony Lochhead 41', Chris Greenacre 63', Paul Ifill 90 + 3'
Red cards: Nil.

Victory turn on the style against Phoenix

By Daniel Quinn

Melbourne Victory have comfortably beaten Wellington Phoenix 3-0 at AAMI Park on Friday night to win just Magilton's second game in eleven.

Jim Magilton made three changes to his Melbourne Victory side for their final home game with Tando Velaphi coming in for his Melbourne Victory A-League debut. Diogo Ferreira also came in for Petar Franjic with Mark Milligan moving into the centre of defence while Isaka Cernak also made way for the returning Carlos Hernandez. Ricki Herbet only made one change to his Wellington Phoenix side with Alex Smith coming in for former Victory midfielder Nick Ward.

In the opening moments of the game both sides looked good going forward with Victory controlling most of the possession but neither side could conjure a real chance until Hernandez on 11 minutes.

Hernandez received the ball from Archie Thompson before thumping the ball into the net with a wonderful strike into the top corner of Mark Paston's net.

Two minutes after taking the lead Hernandez curled a brilliant free-kick into the box but Archie Thompson's flick-on header was directed straight into the hands of Paston.

Seconds later Thompson failed to break his goal scoring drought after beating Manny Muscat and firing low only but Paston comfortably saved.

On 19 minutes Paul Ifill scored almost a duplicate of his goal from last week's 1-1 draw with Melbourne Heart as the former Crystal Palace forward fired just wide of the upright.

Soon after Marco Rojas was substituted for Cernak with a suspected facial injury. On 32 minutes Thompson continued to look to break his drought but after dancing past Andrew Durante and Ben Sigmund he was unlucky to curl his effort into the woodwork.

Smith conjured the Phoenix's first real chance of the half when the English born midfielder crossed for Brown who headed towards goal but directed the effort wide. Wellington continued to push for an



Melbourne Victory	Match Stats	Wellington Phoenix
3	Saves	4
9	Attempts on target	5
3	Attempts off target	4
48%	Possession	52%
3	Corners	3
2	Offsides	3
8	Fouls committed	14

No wonder the fans want him to stay after Carlos Hernandez scores a whopper. Photo: ANITA MILAS

equaliser with Brown who drove an effort towards goal but Velaphi pulled off a great save to deny the New Zealand international.

Substitute Cernak was found on the wing and tested Paston again but the 35-year-old 'keeper denied the Olyroo.

Just before the break Thompson, who hasn't scored in nine games, fired wide once again. Like on many occasions the Socceroo used his pace to get past Sigmund before lobbing just wide of the net.

Two minutes after the break Wellington through Brown had a huge chance to equalise from a Lochhead cross but the

former Newcastle Jet miss-timed his jump to head over.

But Victory through Harry Kewell and Thompson looked to extend their lead.

Kewell first with a thundering effort over Paston's net before Hernandez set up Thompson only for the Socceroo to fire straight at Paston.

But Victory were awarded with their second goal when a brilliant Jimmy Jeggo ball played in Thompson who fired a low ball across to the on rushing Cernak who finished.

Lochhead next pushed forward for the Phoenix but Velaphi was behind to deny

the fullback.

Luck was on the host's side on 66 minutes when the ball fell for Thompson to have another crack but the luck wasn't with the 33-year-old at the right time as he fired his volley over the top of the net. Cernak next almost scored a brace with a great volley at the back post but Paston made a great save to deny the winger.

On 80 minutes former Bayern Munich academy product Julius Davies came on for Kewell to make his A-League debut.

Four minutes after coming Davies could have scored on debut but Sigmund got onto the line to clear to deny the debutant

who was born in Liberia.

With one minute to go Jeggo extended the lead with a stunning first-time effort in off the post from outside of the box to score his debut goal.

Victory were able to hold on for Magilton's second win in charge in their last home game of the season.

Melbourne Victory coach Jim Magilton "Really, really pleased and really proud of the players, really happy for them because it is not easy for them. Playing for Melbourne Victory is not easy, who said it was? It's a privilege and they dealt with it really well tonight so delighted for them."



Isaka Curnak and Andrew Durante make a sandwich with the ball.

Photo: TIME SIZE



Jimmy Jeggo gets in on the act and scores a peach of his own.

Photo: ANITA MILAS

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PICS OF ROUND 26



The Swedish bikini team makes an appearance at Robina to cheer on the Gold Coast. Photo: ADRIAN GAGLIONE



Les Shorrock's Action Packed Picture Page

What's the bet Clint Bolton has got more fans than Michael Bolton these days. Photo: TIM SIZE



With word on the street that Carlos Hernandez might be returning to Costa Rica, Victory fans express their appreciation. Photo: ANITA MILAS



Robert Zadkovich of the Newcastle Jets gets ready for take off. Photo: PETER NEVILLE



Eli Babalj goes close with his effort which ended up hitting the post and going out to safety. Photo: DANIEL FLIS



No more horsing around. Gold Coast fans plead to be given one more chance for the sake of their team. Photo: ADRIAN GAGLIONE



The Melbourne Heart mascot knows a good read when he sees one! Photo: TIM SIZE



Adelaide United v Melbourne Heart

Fri 23 Mar Hindmarsh Stdm 8:00pm

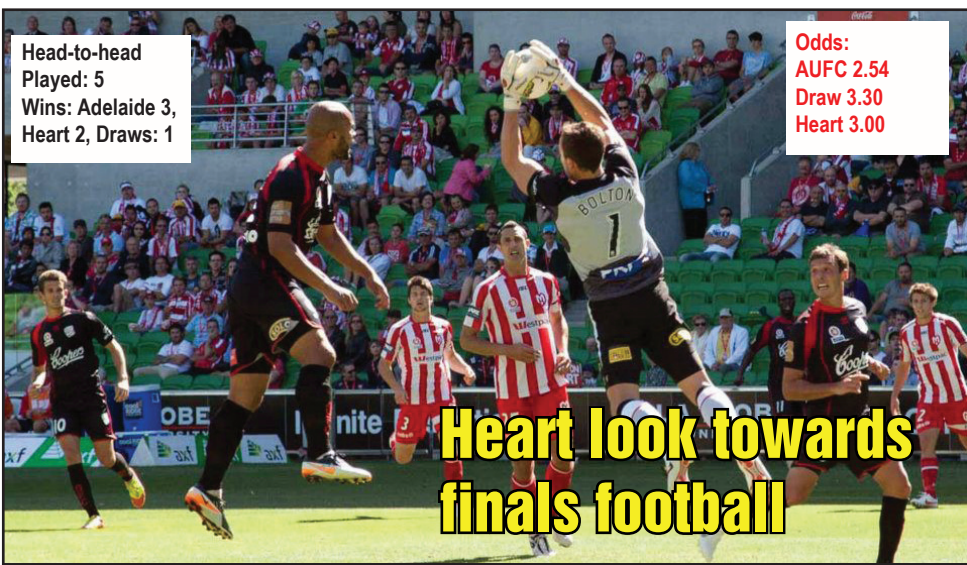
By John Clark

Adelaide hosts the Heart on Friday night at Hindmarsh in what many would consider a dead rubber.

The Reds have been out of finals contention for a number of weeks now, while the Heart all but sealed their first finals berth against Sydney last week.

In a match that was open and entertaining from the outset the Heart looked a million dollars tearing apart Sydney for the second time this season. The Hearts crisp passing game that had been a trademark leading up to Christmas was back in a big way. With Eli Babalj and Mate Duganzdic exquisitely finishing some brilliant lead up work from talisman Fred, the Heart looked set for a big win in their last home game for the season. John Van't Schip must have been wondering just what he did wrong at halftime as after the half the Heart were atrocious.

A Shannon Cole double ensured the points were shared and in fairness the Heart could have no complaints, despite their dominate first half performance. Adelaide did Brisbane no favours by succumbing to the Central Coast Mariners in Gosford. In fairness to the Reds their focus has well and truly shifted,



Head-to-head
Played: 5
Wins: Adelaide 3,
Heart 2, Draws: 1

Odds:
AUFC 2.54
Draw 3.30
Heart 3.00

Heart look towards finals football

ed, from restoring pride in the A-League to making another big play in the Asian Champions League.

The Reds are off to a fantastic start in the competition with an away win over Bunyodkor and a home win over Japanese side Gamba Osaka. However, the busy schedule and small squad size doesn't bode well for their domestic form with the match against the Heart bordering on irrelevant.

The Heart also doesn't have much to play for with an 8-0 loss the only thing standing between them and a debut finals berth. John

Van't Schip is in a sticky situation, caught between trying to build momentum the week before the playoffs and trying to preserve the player's health before the biggest match in the clubs history.

The Heart have yet to beat Adelaide this season the first time they met this season the teams had to settle for a draw after Brendan Hamill opened the scoring in remarkable style only for Spase Dilevski's to equalize after Clint Bolton spilled a free kick late on. On the second occasion the Reds smashed the Heart at their home

away from home AAMI Park. Sergio Van Dijk was the star that day with the big striker instrumental in Adelaide's 3-1 triumph.

Hard to pick a winner here in a match that doesn't mean much to either side, but I think the Hearts first half last week showed some really good signs and even though they were unable to run the match out they should take the points and some much needed momentum here.

Kiss of Death
AUFC 0-1 Heart

MELBOURNE
HEART



Heart Line Up

1. Clint Bolton (GK)
 2. Michael Marrone
 3. Brendan Hamill
 4. Simon Colosimo
 5. Fred (c)
 6. Matt Thompson
 7. Rutger Worm
 10. Wayne Srhoj
 11. Alex Terra
 13. Jonatan Germano
 15. David Williams
 16. Aziz Behich
 17. Jason Hoffman
 18. Curtis Good
 19. Eli Babalj
 23. Mate Duganzdic
 27. Craig Goodwin
 30. Sebastian Mattei (GK)
- Coach: John van 't Schip

In: Jason Hoffman, David Williams, Rutger Worm (all promoted)

Out: Nil

Unavailable: Nil



Perth Glory v Melbourne Victory

Sat 24 Mar nib Stadium 9:30pm

By FFA

Since demolishing Perth Glory 6-2 in a record-breaking result in January 2010, the fortunes have changed somewhat for Melbourne in fixtures between these two sides, with Glory winning three of the next five encounters.

This season, Perth have certainly enjoyed the better of the matches. Down 2-0 and with Liam Miller dismissed, the odds of Perth getting anything from their first clash with Victory were pretty long. But in an incredible fightback, Glory levelled the encounter 2-2 and probably should have won it if Shane Smeltz had his scoring boots on.

But the second clash in January proved to be an absolute romp for Glory as they ran riot in a 4-1 result that could have been much worse for Jim Magilton's men.

Glory have won three of their past five matches but will be somewhat disappointed they followed up a 1-0 win over league leader Central Coast with an insipid 3-0 defeat to cellar dweller Gold Coast last Sunday.

Glory were down to 10 men by the 36th minute last week when Dean Heffernan was sent off and ended up conceding two goals during injury time.

Strangely enough, Victory's form has been the polar opposite of Perth's. Three losses from the past four games saw Melbourne's finals hopes dashed with two matches remaining.

But, at long last, everything eventually clicked for Melbourne against Wellington last Friday night as they unleashed against a disappointing Wellington in a 3-0 win.

Perth Glory will be hoping Jacob Burns is fit to take on Victory after the skipper missed last week's clash with bruised



Odds:
Glory 2.15
Draw 3.50
Victory 3.57

Glory prepares for Victory visit

Head-to-head
Played: 20
Wins: Perth 8, Melbourne
Victory 7, Draws: 5

ribs. Burns is still somewhat sore but may be rushed into the side to boost an undermanned central midfield that was also missing the departed Adam Hughes (China) and injured Miller (hamstring).

Evan Berger continues to be listed as indefinite with his own hamstring issues, while Chris Coyne is still on the sidelines with his Achilles tear.

Marco Rojas will definitely miss this encounter after suffering a broken jaw against Wellington last weekend in a controversial clash with Manny Muscat.

Aside from Rojas, it's difficult to tell how Magilton will go with his selection for this final round of the season. Carlos Hernandez wasn't expected to play, but with news emerging that the club have opened

up negotiations with the Costa Rican, he could be a starter.

Having produced a number of good saves against the Phoenix, Tando Velaphi may remain in goal at the expense of Ante Covic, while youngster Julius Davies could be given another run after making his Victory debut against the Phoenix once being cleared to play.

This is a really tough match to call, considering it's the last game of the season and Melbourne will be desperate to finish on a high.

Normally, you'd give the away team in Perth little chance of coming away with the chocolates, but Victory will also be desperate to atone for their last effort at nib Stadium last January and will take

some form into the game after last week's result.

Glory haven't been at their best over the past month since Miller hurt his hamstring, but they've still managed to notch up three wins, including a 1-0 result against Central Coast on a brutally hot day.

The injuries are starting to take their toll on Glory, as shown by last week's effort, but Ian Ferguson's men have it all to play for in the last round as they look to secure third on the table and the possibility of home finals the first two weekends. Should be a cracking match!

Kiss of Death
Glory 1-1 Victory



Victory Line Up

1. Tando Velaphi (gk)
 2. Matthew Foschini
 3. Fabio
 4. Petar Franjic
 5. Mark Milligan
 6. Leigh Broxham
 7. Matthew Kemp
 9. Jean Carlos Solorzano
 10. Archie Thompson
 11. Marco Rojas
 12. Rodrigo Vargas
 13. Diogo Ferreira
 16. Carlos Hernandez
 17. Jimmy Jeggo
 18. Danny Allsopp
 19. Isaka Cernak
 21. Ante Covic (GK)
 22. Harry Kewell
 24. Ubay Luzardo
- *four to be omitted*
- Coach: Jim Magilton

In: 7. Matthew Kemp (returns from internal suspension), 12. Rodrigo Vargas (promoted), 16. Carlos Hernandez (returns from suspension), 13. Diogo Ferreira (promoted)

Out: 14. Billy Celeski (injured),

Unavailable: 8. Grant Brebner (injured), Adrian Leijer (injured), Billy Celeski (injured)

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Phoenix Line Up

1. Mark Paston (GK)
2. Manny Muscat
3. Tony Lochhead,
6. Tim Brown
7. Leo Bertos
8. Paul Ifill
9. Chris Greenacre
12. Nicky Ward
13. Niko Tsattalios
14. Mirjan Pavlovic
17. Vince Lia
18. Ben Sigmund
20. Tony Warner (GK)
21. Dani Sanchez
22. Andrew Durante (C)
24. Alex Smith
one to be omitted
Coach: Ricki Herbert

In: Leo Bertos (returns from injury)

Out: Nil

Unavailable: Daniel (ankle injury 4 to 6 weeks), Lucas Pantelis (knee injury - indefinite), Jimmy Downey (2 to 3 weeks)

Wellington Phoenix v CC Mariners

Sun 25 Mar Westpac Stadium 2:00pm

By Joe Gallagher

With the finals series taking shape, it will come down to the last day of the season to determine who will finish where as Central Coast Mariners head to Wellington on Sunday for a match up against the Phoenix.

It is already known that the Mariners will face off against Brisbane Roar in the first two rounds of the finals and that Wellington will host at least one more fixture in the finals, but there is still a phenomenal amount at stake in this weekend's final round.

Three points for Central Coast would give them their first minor Premiers plate, but failure to win would see them look nervously over their shoulders to the Roar in the regular season's last match in what could be Gold Coast's last appearance.

Wellington on the other hand will know exactly what is needed to finish third, needing to better Perth's result against Melbourne Victory the previous night to usurp the Glory.

Third spot would for either the Phoenix or the Glory would rule out the possibility of an exhausting five-thousand kilometre journey in the second week of the finals.

The Mariners will likely go into the match as favourites, looking to inflict their first clean sweep over the Phoenix since 2008 after two convincing victories already this season



Odds:
Phoenix 2.45
Draw 3.40
Mariners 2.85

High stakes as season hangs in the balance

— a 2-1 win in Wellington last November and a 2-0 triumph at home five weeks ago.

But Wellington will have plenty to offer to the contest and will be buoyed by a big crowd, coming off the back of a demoralising loss to Melbourne Victory

Ricki Herbert should have a full squad to play with as Leo Bertos returns to fitness after featuring off the bench during their fortnight in Melbourne.

Graham Arnold's side will be backing up from a Wednesday night fixture in the Asian Champions League but will

also be at full strength for their one final push for the league title. Especially dangerous to the Wellington cause will be the Mariners' youthful attacking trio of Mustafa Amini, Bernie Ibini and Tomas Rogic — the latter two already having netted against the Phoenix this term.

Sunday's match may also prove to be a warm up for what promises to be a very tight finals series. Should they fail to win, Central Coast will head into the post-season having won only two of their last nine fixtures. Conversely, if Wellington cannot pick up three points, they will have closed

out their campaign without a win in three.

But a win for either side will see them enter the playoffs with possibly the most valuable resource of all: confidence.

What could be the largest Phoenix crowd of the season will be in attendance, and there's just as much at stake. And with so much on the line, Wellington will experience the intensity of finals football a week early this year.

**Kiss of Death
Phoenix 1-0 Mariners**



Mariners Line Up

1. Mathew Ryan (Gk)
2. Daniel McBreen
3. Joshua Rose
4. Pedj Bojic
6. Patrick Zwaanswijk
7. John Hutchinson
9. Bernie Ibini
10. Adriano Pellegrino
11. Oliver Bozanic
12. Troy Hearfield
14. Michael McGlinchey
15. Brad McDonald
16. Trent Sainsbury
17. Tomas Rogic
18. Alex Wilkinson (C)
19. John Sutton
20. Justin Pasfield (Gk)
21. Sam Gallagher
22. Mustafa Amini
23. Adam Kwasnik
five to be omitted
Coach: Graham Arnold

In: 10. Adriano Pellegrino, 15. Brad McDonald, 19. John Sutton, 21. Sam Gallagher, 22. Mustafa Amini (All Promoted)

Out: Nil

Unavailable: Nil



Sydney FC Line Up

1. Liam Reddy
4. Pascal Bosschaert
5. Michael Beauchamp
6. Hirofumi Moriyasu
7. Brett Emerton
9. Bruno Cazarine
10. Nick Carle
11. Dimi Petratos
12. Shannon Cole
15. Terry McFlynn (c)
16. Joel Chianese
17. Terry Antonis
19. Mark Bridge
20. Ivan Necevski
21. Scott Jamieson
23. Rhyann Grant
24. Mitch Mallia
two to be omitted
Coach: Vitezslav Lavicka

In: Hiro Moriyasu (promoted), Shannon Cole (promoted), Mitch Mallia (promoted)

Out: Karol Kisel (suspended — 1 week)

Unavailable: Nil

Sydney FC v Newcastle Jets

Sun 25 Mar Sydney Football Stdm 4:00pm

By Shaun Dyas

Sydney FC will take on the Newcastle Jets at Allianz Stadium on Sunday in a one-off shoot out for a place in the Hyundai A-League finals in Vitezslav Lavicka's last match in charge of the Sky Blues at home.

One game. One Chance. A farewell to a Double-winning Coach. One great occasion!

The Sky Blues faithful will flood Allianz Stadium as, not for the first time, Sydney FC face a final day fight at home, this time the prize is a place in the finals and the opponent is NSW rivals Newcastle Jets.

Two years ago more than 25,000 fans descended on the Sydney Football Stadium as the Sky Blues faced Melbourne Victory on the last day of the season and on the back of a month of strong performance and results there's no doubt another huge last day crowd will greet the Sky Blues players on Sunday.

The match will also see Lavicka in charge of the Sky Blues for the final time at Allianz Stadium with the prospect of Sydney FC playing a home final incredibly thin.

Lavicka will be honoured by the Sky Blues players and fans before the match, which promises to be one of the biggest of the season.



Odds:
SFC 2.17
Draw 3.50
Jets 3.40

Moment of truth arrives

Meanwhile, Hunter Ports Newcastle Jets attacker Ali Abbas says the Jets are eager to secure a place in the A-League top six to reward the Club's loyal Members and supporters.

A win or draw in Sunday's do-or-die clash with Sydney FC at Allianz Stadium will be enough for the Jets to progress through to the finals series.

Abbas believes the Jets will be buoyed by their 5-2 win over the Sky Blues earlier this season.

"They are a very good team and to get that win over them has given us confidence and hopefully we can do it

again," Abbas said.

"We've done a really good job the last two months and we have to win this game to make a statement for the Members and supporters so we can go and play in the finals."

On a personal note, Abbas will be full of confidence after performing well when given the opportunity to start in the 2-1 loss to Brisbane Roar.

The former Iraqi international was a constant threat to the Roar defence and scored a stunning free-kick just before half-time to level the scores at 1-1.

"I was really happy, It's been a long time and finally I got to start and I got a chance to show my skills for the team, coaches and everyone," Abbas said.

"I was happy to score, but still really disappointed that we lost.

"Everyday I used to practice free-kicks and now I am doing it properly and I think I'm getting quite good at it, so hopefully I can score some more."

**Kiss of Death
SFC 2-2 Jets**



Jets Line Up

1. Ben Kennedy (gk)
2. Taylor Regan
4. Nikolai Topor-Stanley
5. Tiago Calvano
6. Ben Kantarovski
8. Jeremy Brockie
9. Michael Bridges
10. Ruben Zadkovich
11. Tarek Elrich
12. Jobe Wheelhouse
13. Sung-Hwan Byun
14. Labinot Haliti
19. Matthew Nash (gk)
22. Ali Abbas
23. Ryan Griffiths
24. Francis Jeffers
25. Jacob Pepper
26. Connor Chapman
two to be omitted
Coach: Gary van Egmond

In: Ruben Zadkovich (returns from suspension), 26. Connor Chapman

Out: Nil

Unavailable: Nil

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Gold Coast Line Up

20.Jerrad Tyson (gk)
2.Josh Brillante
3.Michael Thwaite (c)
4.Zac Anderson
7.Golgol Mebrahtu
10.Tahj Minniecon
11.Jake Barker-Daish
15.Adama Traore
16.Maceo Rigters
17.Chris Harold
18.James Brown
21.Daniel Severino
22.Peter Jungschlager
23.Dylan McGowan
28.Daniel Bowle
31.Daniel Bragg
33.Mitch Cooper
40.Chris O'Connor (gk)
Coach: Mike Mulvey

In: 33.Mitch Cooper, 7.Golgol Mebrahtu,18.James Brown (all return from injury)

Out: Nil

Unavailable: 1.Glen Moss (groin injury – 1 week), 9.Joel Porter (calf – 2 weeks), 12.Dylan Macallister (hamstring – 1 week), 19.Chris Broadfoot (ankle injury – indefinite), 13.Ante Rozic (hamstring injury – 1 week), 14.Ben Halloran (injured – 2 weeks)

Gold Coast United v Brisbane Roar

By Jarrod Ellis

With the regular season coming to a close this weekend League title proceedings are set to come to a head. With only two points separating Brisbane Roar and Central Coast Mariners at the top of the table either club could be crowned League Champions and when Brisbane travels to Gold Coast on Sunday the result could decide the destination of the ‘Toilet Seat’.

That possibility of course rests on the result of the earlier match between Central Coast and Wellington, but facing the Phoenix at Westpac Stadium is never an easy task and for much of Brisbane’s game the outcome will be unknown.

Not quite the machine they were in the opening third of the season, the Roar, in recent weeks, has at least rediscovered some of the form that went missing in the middle third of the campaign.

They are now seven games undefeated on the trot and, with five wins over that period, heading into the final round in good form.

That includes their midweek performance against Beijing Guoan where Brisbane were unlucky not to take more than a point from a fixture that ended 1-1.

The concern for the reigning premiers is that fatigue could play a significant part in Sunday’s game, given the travel to and from Beijing along with the fact that it was the first choice eleven that took to the pitch against the Chinese



Odds:
Gold 4.40
Draw 3.65
Roar 1.85

Head-to-head
Played: 8 Wins:
Gold Coast 4,
Brisbane 2, Draws:
2

club. However the Roar isn’t suffering on the injury front and as long as the players can recover in the five day time frame Brisbane should take to the park at full-strength.

In important matches it’s paramount that key players perform and the Roar will be looking for Thomas Broich to step up after a quiet performance against Beijing. If the German can find his touch his contribution should go along way to unlocking a Gold Coast defence that has never looked settled this season.

For Gold Coast United Sunday’s game also has special significance as it could

Sun 25 Mar Skilled Park 6:30pm

very well be the last appearance for the club in the A-League.

Few could have predicted the meltdown that enveloped Gold Coast this season, poor performances, crowd limits, court proceedings, coach resignations and ultimately the retraction of the A-League license from owner Clive Palmer.

In spite of that there have been several positives that have emerged from the ashes of a disastrous campaign. United have cultivated one of the most impressive crops of young players in the league and in recent weeks they’ve shown just how skilled they are, taking a point in Newcastle and crushing

Perth Glory 3-0 at Skilled Stadium.

Given that this could be the last time this team plays together expect Gold Coast to come roaring out of the gates come the whistle for kick-off.

James Brown should return to the starting line-up and will provide plenty of problems for the Brisbane defence.

Tahj Minniecon is another who could play a decisive part, the former Roar man has been out for much of the season and only made a return to action last week. Despite being unlikely to start if brought on late his pace could undo the slow Brisbane defence

Kiss of Death
Gold Coast 1-2 Roar



Roar Line Up

1. Michael Theoklitos (GK)
2. Matt Smith (C)
3. Shane Stefanutto
4. Matt Jurman
5. Ivan Franjic
6. Erik Paaratlu
7. Besart Berisha
8. Massimo Muroccca
10. Henrique
11. Issey Nakajima-Farran
16. Mohamed Adnan
17. Mitch Nichols
19. Jack Hingert
20. Andrew Redmayne (GK)
21. James Meyer
22. Thomas Broich
24. Nick Fitzgerald
two to be omitted
Coach: Ange Postecoglou

In: 8. Massimo Muroccca (returns from injury), 10. Henrique (returns from suspension), 17. Mitch Nichols (returns from injury), 19. Jack Hingert (promoted)

Out: Luke Brattan (knee – two weeks), Rocky Visconte (ankle – two weeks)

Unavailable: Nil

TV rights pact important for football’s pathway



Since the reformation of Australian football in 2005, there has seemingly never been a more crucial period in the game’s history.

Following the inaugural season of the invigorated domestic competition, Football Federation Australia signed off, what was the most lucrative television deal in the sport’s history – putting pen to paper on a \$120-million, seven-year deal with Foxtel broadcaster Fox Sports. With the current contract expiring in June 2013, FFA chief executive Ben Buckley holds the key to unlocking a bigger, better and more rewarding financial package in the new TV rights deal.

The current seven-year venture had plenty of critics, arguing that the length of the contract was far too long, whilst the lack of free-to-air component had limited the sport’s reach to a more mainstream market. However, if we think on a more lateral level, it provided the game with a sound financial backing for an extended period of time, something that football wasn’t accustomed to in years gone by. Realistically, if Fox Sports didn’t come to the party, there are grave doubts that the A-League, as we know it today, wouldn’t exist.

Buckley, formerly Andrew Demetriou’s right-hand man at the AFL, was the protagonist behind its previous TV rights deal from 2007-2011, negotiating an impressive \$780-million, five-year pact with free-to-air networks Seven and Ten, and additionally Fox Sports.

While Buckley may not be universally loved by enthusiasts of the round-ball code – often due to his former alliance with Aussie Rules

and an inability to financially stabilise the A-League– he certainly has the opportunity to put his critics to bed, with a cavernous cut of the pie in the new TV deal.

Many critics believe that \$30-35-million per annum would be a fantastic outcome for the code, significantly aiding the A-League – contributing towards clubs’ salary cap wages – underpinning a more vibrant and financially viable competition. In retrospect, this would be a brilliant result, although there are many factors to consider when assessing the new TV rights deal.

While the competition is still in its infancy, undeniably the product has matured enormously over the past few years. Technically the game has enhanced considerably, coaches are much more tactically astute, a higher quality of imported players are plying their trade down under, Socceroos stars Harry Kewell and Brett Emerton are conveying a greater interest in the media, while TV audiences and crowds continue to rise in this campaign.

All these factors – particularly the upward trend in TV audiences, up around 50 per cent this season – will significantly help in the FFA’s negotiation process.

With besieged outfit Gold Coast United uncertain of its A-League future beyond this weekend – after FFA revoked the licence off mining tycoon Clive Palmer – FFA knows too well the financial ramifications that would be imposed if the league contracts to a nine-team competition during the negotiation phase. It’s imperative that the Gold Coast community rally behind its club, seek a shrewd community ownership model – a consortium of local businessman, in conjunction with Asian investors, are reportedly keen on bankrolling the club – and demonstrate that an A-League club is viable in the region.

The area has a wealth of potential – the sixth largest market in Australia, predicted to top 700,000 residents by



Cable guy? Let’s face it, it could be worse...

2021 – however it was unable to realise it under the boorish management of Mr. Palmer. The national governing body should be doing everything in its powers to keep Gold Coast in the competition, not only for the future development in the region and competition – with a long-term ambition of a 12-14-team league – but importantly for the financial pay packet with the forthcoming TV rights deal.

In addition, FFA has made no secret of its desire to have a team situated in Western Sydney as soon as possible – an area considered the heartland of Australian football. While it’s only a matter of time before a team is positioned there, Canberra is also looming as a realistic prospect for a future A-League licence. Bid leader Ian Slavich has secured financial backing from the ACT government, private investment and 2,000 foundational members, who have donated \$200 each. While the bid is approximately \$2-million short of reaching the financial demands set by FFA, there is still optimism circling the nation’s capital. Assuming the Gold Coast licence is reinstated, the A-League could realistically have a 12-team competition within the next two to five-year period. The prospect of more teams, initiates a longer season and an improved

cause for an enhanced TV deal.

In regards to FTA, is it time for football to liberate its shackles on Foxtel and allow FTA networks to also telecast the A-League and Socceroos matches?

In an ideal world, Australian football would be on FTA, along with Fox Sports. The notion of having this scenario would have fans jumping for joy. SBS is the obvious choice – with its sound football heritage – but it’s exceedingly doubtful that it could compete with Foxtel’s big dollars. Currently, SBS televises the prestigious UEFA Champions League tournament and select international fixtures, while also hosting the weekly review show, The World Game.

Channel 10’s OneHD could also be another option, although it’s unknown whether the broadcaster is interested at present. While channel nine, who lost the bidding war to host AFL, could also be a contender. Its HD station GEM poses another alternative.

The FTA market is colossal, boasting 70 per cent of television’s reach. FFA has made no secret about its desire to have a FTA component, although it must be for the right price. Similar to the current AFL package, it would be advantageous for the FFA to have a similar deal – where Foxtel has the

rights to a certain number or all of the games, while FTA has a set amount each week and a highlights package.

Unfortunately, without the rudiments of FTA, the A-League is limiting its potential reach. For the competition to cultivate and continue in an upward trend, FTA may be the catalyst for football to move into a new degree of professionalism.

Fox Sports do offer a stylish, enjoyable viewing experience. Their expert panellists, in particular Mark Bosnich and Adam Peacock, are charismatic and bring a sense of fun to the table. Moreover, in the new TV rights deal, more concrete analysis of the game is a necessity, if the code wants to compete with the AFL’s Fox Footy coverage or the various NRL shows on offer.

Currently, Fox Sports dedicates a one-hour programme on the week’s football issues – where only half-an-hour is solely bestowed towards Australian football – A-League, Socceroos etc – while the other half is habitually focussed on the English Premier League. This is not nearly enough in-depth analysis on the code’s chief talking points, in contrast to the rival codes.

People may believe that the demand isn’t there for a wider range of football shows or extended coverage of its present format. However, it’s evident that football has a vast following throughout the nation. If Fox Sports decides to persist with Fox Sports FC as the sole talkback panel programme, it must encompass a more construed effort towards the local game and the issues confronting the code.

Furthermore, when Australian clubs compete in the Asian Champions League, it’s perplexing that Fox Sports decides to abandon its magazine style program for the week. It’s a clear illustration of the code’s lack of media transparency, and must be rectified in the new TV agreement.

Whilst on the local scene, the Na-

tional Youth League – an important pathway to the A-League, where the next generation of players are unearthed – is generally neglected by the media. If FFA wants to seriously foster, and nurture the development of the country’s best prodigies, then the media must also dedicate more time towards this competition.

In the NRL, its youth league – the Toyota Cup – is televised on Fox Sports on a weekly basis. Whereas in the AFL, the various state league competitions, essentially the AFL clubs’ reserve squads – the VFL, SANFL, WAFL etc – are also broadcast weekly.

If youth are a key priority for football, then FFA must follow suite with its rival codes and look at airing NYL games – even if it’s only one-game per round. NYL curtain-raisers to A-League fixtures could be the way to implement the process. Fans are generally interested in their club’s youth set-up, and would certainly warm to the concept of NYL coverage.

By and large, the football community should feel optimistic with the game’s direction. We must remember it wasn’t that long ago where Australia didn’t have the privilege of a professional national competition, engulfed with a glut of mainstream media coverage. There are still many impediments to overcome; it won’t always be smooth sailing. However, if we can take confidence from where the game has come, to the proficient environment it is immersed in today, then football will certainly be a mainstay in Australia’s clustered sporting atmosphere.

The new TV rights deal is important for the code’s imminent direction and financial security. Whether it includes FTA, remains to be seen at present. Although, improved coverage and of course, a superior cash settlement will go a long way towards securing a brighter future from the grassroots, all the way through to the A-League competition.

Follow Robert on Twitter @ RobertDiFabio

BRENDAN HAMILL

Melbourne Heart



PHOTOS/GRAPHICS: ANITA MILAS

Finals fever comes to Westfield

Meet your favourite football stars and get a photo with the Hyundai A-League Championship Trophy.

Ever wanted to get the inside scoop from a professional football player on what it's like to prepare for a big game and hold the Championship Trophy? Now is your chance to find out as stars of the Hyundai A-League visit Westfield centres across Australia, to meet and greet with local fans to help kick-off the Hyundai A-League 2012 Finals Series.

"This is a great opportunity for fans to connect with their Hyundai A-League heroes and get the chance to see and get a photo with the Championship Trophy," said Head of A-League Lyall Gorman.

"Fans will also have the opportunity to engage with the players in a Q & A session as well as have their photo taken with the Hyundai A-League Championship trophy.

"This is a fantastic initiative from Westfield partnering with the Hyundai A-League and I'm sure we'll see many excited fans come out and share this experience with their teams as we reach this season's climax."

Die-hard guests are also encouraged to bring along memorabilia for signings. All photos from the event will be made available on the Facebook page of each Westfield centre visited.

In total eight Westfield centres will be visited in Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney, Central Coast, Perth, Newcastle and Adelaide between March 21 and April 19 before ending its journey at the Hyundai A-League 2012 Grand Final where this season's Champion will be crowned on Sunday, April 22.

- Westfield Garden City – Brisbane Roar (March 27)
- Westfield Southland – Melbourne Victory (March 28)
- Westfield Burwood – Sydney FC (April 3)
- Westfield Tuggerah – Central Coast Mariners (April 10)
- Westfield Kotara – Newcastle Jets (April 11)
- Westfield Whitford City – Perth Glory (April 18)
- Westfield Marion – Adelaide United (April 19)



BOO'S WORLD

With Mark Boric

Well the 2012 VPL season is now upon us. Unfortunately the print edition of Goal! Weekly won't be continuing beyond the A-League season, which means the coverage of the league will sadly be diminished.

You may find a few articles on the VPL on the FFV website below the VCL and Women's Football stories. The FFV obviously feel they have taken the right approach, but anyone who can recall the glory days of the league and looks at today's crowds will see things are heading in the wrong direction.

Southern Stars are new to the VPL, and don't be suprised to see Jim Magilton at their games keeping an eye on Irish boys he could sign for Melbourne Victory once visa spots have been cleared by ridding himself of some pesky Latinos. Also new, well, new name, old club, are Moreland Zebras. It will be good to have Epping Stadium back amongst the VPL venues.

Last year's champions Green Gully will surely be amongst the leading contenders again in 2012.

Beaten Grand Finalists Oakleigh Cannons have endured greater player turnover, including Craig Coodwin who according to some sources had a spell at AFL/TAC Cup team Oakleigh Cargers before joining Melbourne Heart. Good luck to new coach Huss Skenderovic, who has succeeded Arthur Papas.

Of last season's finalists, Hume City and Heidelberg United are tipped to struggle to reach those heights this time around. South Melbourne, however, are back home at Lakeside Stadium under the astute Peter Tsolakis and will be expected to go closer to mounting a championship challenge.

Northcote City will have been hit hard by the loss of Tsolakis (and Trent Rixon and the Trifiro brothers with him) but the close knit group is not to be underestimated. Bentleigh Greens, in return for hosting NYL games, will have the pick of the Victory Youth players who become available.

Perhaps it is Dandenong Thunder who should have been given the pick of the Victory Youth crop



Teams go to battle in the It's a Knockout Something or Other Named Cup.

seeing as the heavy fines imposed on them by the Tribunal last year probably helped the FFV fund their contribution to "Victory Youth". Regardless, the club has bounced back and the Thunderdome is ready to rock again.

New lights are up at Richmond who will be hoping to get the fixtures changed back to Friday nights for 2012. There has been the return of no less than three prodigal sons to Kevin Bartlett Reserve, and the recent cycle of up season/down season has this year land on up.

Hopefully the Melbourne Knights can have a big season after a few lean years. The VPL really needs a strong Melbourne Knights and Rus Rastocic has the pitch in great nick for some good football to be played on it.

Finally, some random thoughts. Can't say I'm happy about Harry Kewell being King of Moomba. He's a Sydney Pom, it ain't right. The honour has already been devalued by the Zig and Zag episode, this is just another backward step. Was he on a percentage of all the carnival rides and attractions? And poor Zag, by the way, I bet most people don't know who was the dodgy one.

Can I just say what a captivating name the State Knockout Cup is? It is so simple and functional, they must have picked it up from IKEA. Doesn't really inspire much passion, though.

I wish I'd known Clive Palmer was such a fan of Freedom of Speech after having written some of my more problematic columns. With his backing perhaps I could have remained more outspoken and not caved in to legal demands and threats.

A Club in a Nutshell

With Jimmy Piccolo

Swindon Town



Budda bing, budda boom! Paolo Di Canio is leading Swindon Town out of the wilderness.

Swindon Town, also known as 'The Robins', are a league two team in England, Wiltshire actually, or the county of Wilts if you prefer. The home of Swindon, the county ground where they play, lies in this mysterious land. Ever heard of Stonehenge? Surely you have - some pre-historic giant sized rocks in a large circle that nobody seems to truly know where they came from or how they got there or why. These mysterious rocks are linked to the devil and druid-worship, famous and infamous festivals in other tongues, strange stories of Merlin via Arthurian legend (you know King Arthur - the bloke with the pointy beard, a round table and a bunch of nights that like to say "nee") or similar.

Sounds like an interesting club you may well think? Yes it is.

Formed in 1879, the year the British had a scrap with the Zulu and won after some bloody encounters, namely Rourke's drift, which was immortalised in film with a certain cockney geezer called Michael Caine stealing the limelight. Some clever bloke named Albert Einstein popped out of the womb, and another smart fellow, Thomas Edison, tested the first light bulb... A busy year then.

Swindon, the railway town team, kicked off their own mythical journey

wearing a white shirt with black shorts and socks. They got bored though, so changed to red and black quarter shirts, then green, although green dye was hard to source so they decided on red with a tweak here and there. The club badge had the same treatment through the years, varying from a bird (robin red breast) to a steam train, sometimes both. The earliest pitch they used was next to a quarry, but then a young supporter fell in (!), so they moved to Lansdown Road and then to The Croft, before finally making up their mind and set-

tling at The County ground. Swindon were sunk by a Manchester United Team 8-4 in a charity shield match in 1911, then later donated the proceeds to the survivors of the Titanic (a much more devastating result than Swindon's loss).

During the 2nd World War, Swindon were paid a sum of cash to allow the military to use their pitch as a prisoner of war camp (POW). The area was badly affected during this period of war, so it was not until the 1960s that Swindon came alive and began

to produce some good football, notably winning the Anglo-Italian cup two years on the trot (a cup to introduce lower league clubs to European football), although the 1970 cup final against S.S.C Napoli was interrupted due to a violent exchange between supporters and a pitch invasion. Leading up to the heady 60s, Swindon were the first club to test out "Floodlights" (1951), although it wasn't until 1956 that the 'floods' were used in a league match. Portsmouth using them at Fratton Park a week before Swindon Town had the chance to light up the stadium as the pioneers.

Swindon have had ups and downs like any club. The ugly face of hooliganism and notorious groups like S.T.A.B. (Swindon Town Aggro Boys), S.A.S. (Swindon Active Service) and the S.S.F. (Swindon Southside Firm) caused mindless violence and saw more fans barred from football matches than would be needed to lift the Stonehenge boulders! Still, for every idiot, there is a real pro like John Trollope, who played 770 league games for the Robins (889 first team matches), and Harry Morris, who scored 229 goals between 1926 and 1933.

The club have enjoyed massive match attendences, notably against Arsenal (a record 32,000), several

promotions and division winners' titles, the most sublime being under the guidance of ex-Spurs and England midfield genius "Glenn Hoddle", who took them to the dizzy heights of the premiership in 1993, although the fairy tale ended there, as they currently hold the record for most goals conceded in the premiership in a season (100). More trouble for the club though as they slipped back down the league, and sadly found themselves in massive debt on more than one occasion. Fans were so down in the dumps that the club were rated as the fifth most stressful team to support (out of the 92 league clubs) in a report entitled "football fever report" in 2007.

Mind you, times change and today they are doing pretty decently under the managerial influence of a living legend, Paulo Di Cannio, who played with a host of massive clubs in his time such as Juventus, Napoli, Lazio, Milan, Celtic and West Ham United, where he is still idolised by The Hammers supporters to this day for his heroics and amazing goals. So Swindon are in good hands once again, as arguably Paulo has the magic touch too! Ok, so he is not Merlin, but he has certainly transformed Swindon from a dead weight into gold, and has them sitting top of the table. Maybe more folk lore in the making? You bet.

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Thrills and heavyweight spills in Round Two FFV Cup action

By Donald Sutherland

The Victoria Cup continued last weekend with a series of surprising upsets, new clubs competing, and a quite extraordinary score line.

This week's big upset went to Metropolitan League outfit St. Kilda SC who defeated Clifton Hill 2-1 at home, who play in State League Two – a staggering five leagues above the underdogs. Fellow Metro League side Altona North were equally impressive, travelling away to Western Eagles and returning with a 3-2 win. It's insult to injury for the Albion-based club, who are still reeling from dropping from Provisional League One (North-West) in the 2011 season.

Peninsula Strikers played their first game in the knockout competition after progressing by default after neighbours Frankston Pines forfeited. The Strikers hosted Mornington SC at Centenary Park in a five goal thriller finishing 3-2 to Peninsula.

Berwick City continued cup form by knocking out State League Two side Casey Comets at home. City have now scored 6 goals in two games, and go confident into their next game against Seaford United, when they travel away for the first time in the competition.

Seaford meet Berwick after defeating Parkmore SC – another side who played their first knockout match after progressing by default in the previous round.

The Kingston City v. Caulfield United match was one to remember as 17 goals were scored in a tight encounter with Kingston (who play 3 leagues above their opponents) scrapping past into the next round, winning 9-8.

Middle Park defeated Collingwood City 5-3 at the State Football Centre, which acts as a preface to the identical fixture in the opening round of the 2012 Provisional League Two South-East season.

The State Football Centre again hosted numerous knockout games, with



Adam Orme (Moreland City takes a ride on back of Moreland United's Simon Eyar. PHOTO: JOHN PUNSHON

Old Trinity Grammarians going down 2-0 to Old Camberwell Grammarians, South Yarra losing 2-0 to Yarraville, Riversdale comfortably knocking out Ashburton 4-0, Strathmore defeating Flemington Eagles 3-0, and Malvern City winning 2-0 against Melbourne Uni.

Last week's giant killer, Melton Phoenix, had their bubble burst by Keilor Park, as they were humbled 5-0 away from home.

A visible gulf in class was on display

at Jubilee Park where Eastern Lions beat Ringwood City 4-0 in a match which should have had more goals had it not been for the Ringwood City shot-stopper. Eastern Lions held the majority of the possession, with Ringwood camped in their defensive half, and gave away the football far too often.

Heatherton United, Brandon Park, Essendon Royals, and Geelong Rangers all progressed after all smacked 5 goals past their respective opponents, with Hoppers Crossing, Moreland City

and on-fire Ballarat Red Devils going a step further by dominating their opponents 9-1, 8-1 and 6-1 respectively.

In the remaining results, Nunawading beat Old Xaverians 3-0, North Caulfield defeated Bayside Argonauts, Sebastopol kept their cup run going by beating Breakwater Eagles, Ballarat comfortably toppled Bell Park 3-0, Sunbury United knocked out Avondale Heights and Watsonia defeated fellow Men's Provisional League Div 3 North-West outfit, Bundoora United 3-2.

FFV Cup Results

Sunbury United 3- 0 Avondale Heights	South Yarra 0- 2 Yarraville
Essendon Royals 5- 1 Northern Roosters	Westvale 0- 0 North Sunshine Eagles
Flemington Eagles 0- 3 Strathmore	Lara 1- 6 Ballarat Red Devils
Moreland United 1- 8 Moreland City	Geelong Rangers 5- 2 Warrnambool Wolves
La Trobe Univ 3- 3 Heidelberg Eagles	Parkmore 0- 1 Seaford United
Bundoora United 2- 3 Watsonia Heights	Western Eagles 2- 3 Altona North
North Caulfield 2- 1 Bayside Argonauts	Bell Park 0- 3 Ballarat North United
Kingston City 9- 8 Caulfield United Cobras	Old Trinity Grammarians 0- 2 Old Camberwell Grammarians
Ringwood City 0- 4 Eastern Lions	Box Hill United 2- 2 Doncaster Rovers
Brandon Park 5 – 2 Croydon City Arrows	Middle Park 5- 3 Collingwood City
Heatherton United 5- 0Keysborough	Ashburton United 0- 4 Riversdale
Peninsula Strikers 3- 2 Mornington	Melbourne University 0- 2 Malvern City
Hoppers Crossing 9- 1 Truganina	Breakwater Eagles 1- 3 Sebastopol Vikings
Berwick City 2- 1 Casey Comets	St Kilda Soccer Club 2- 1 Clifton Hill
Keilor Park 5- 0 Melton Phoenix	
Nunawading City 3- 0 Old Xaverians	

FFV Cup Next Round Fixtures

8:00 PM Fri 23/Mar Old Camberwell Gram v Nunawading City Olympic Park	3:00 PM Sat 24/Mar Keilor Park v Westvale Keilor Park Recreation Reserve - Pitch 1
1:00 PM Sat 24/Mar Sebastopol Vikings v Geelong Rangers St Georges Reserve	3:00 PM Sat 24/Mar La Trobe University v Watsonia Heights Latrobe Uni Lower Playing Field - Pitch 1
1:30 PM Sat 24/Mar Malvern City v St Kilda Soccer Club State Football Centre - Pitch 2 (S)	3:00 PM Sat 24/Mar Seaford United v Berwick City North Seaford Reserve - Pitch 1
3:00 PM Sat 24/Mar Heidelberg Stars v Diamond Valley United Cartledge Reserve - Pitch 1	3:00 PM Sat 24/Mar Essendon Royals v Sunbury United Reggio Calabria Club
3:00 PM Sat 24/Mar Peninsula Strikers v Heatherton United Centenary Park	3:00 PM Sat 24/Mar Caulfield Grammarians v Kingston City The Grange Reserve
3:00 PM Sat 24/Mar Mooroolbark Senior v Monbulk Rangers Esther Park Reserve	3:00 PM Sat 24/Mar Ballarat Red Devils v Ballarat North United Trekardo Park
3:00 PM Sat 24/Mar Brandon Park v Eastern Lions Freeway Reserve - Pitch 1	4:00 PM Sat 24/Mar Moreland City v Strathmore State Football Centre - Pitch 1 (S)
3:00 PM Sat 24/Mar Riversdale v Doncaster Rovers Gardiners Creek Reserve - Pitch 1	4:00 PM Sat 24/Mar Yarraville v Middle Park State Football Centre - Pitch 2 (S)
3:00 PM Sat 24/Mar Altona North v Hoppers Crossing Grange Reserve - Pitch 2	7:00 PM Sun 25/Mar North Caulfield Senior v Sandringham Veneto Club - David Barro Stadium



Steve Papaluca (Moreland United) seems to have forgotten which game he is playing as he picks up the ball under pressure from Alex Arragin (Moreland City). A bemused Yalda Yalda looks on. PHOTO: JOHN PUNSHON



Adam Orme (left) gets his season off to a flying start with an early goal, the first of four he scored in Moreland City's 8-1 demolition of Moreland United. Kam Simsek is ready with the high fives. PHOTO: JOHN PUNSHON





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Couch Potato

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SBS ONE
Sunday March 26th
10:30 AM FIFA World Cup 2014 Magazine
11:00 AM Les Murray's Football Feature - Highlights of 2012 Coppa Italia: Semi-final (2nd Leg) - Juventus v AC Milan.
12:00 PM UEFA Champions League Magazine Program

Monday March 26th
04:30 PM FIFA Futbol Mundial
11:05 PM The World Game

Wednesday March 28th
05:30 AM UEFA Champions League - Quarter-final (1st Leg) - Live to all areas.

07:45 AM UEFA Champions League - Quarter-final (1st Leg) - Delayed coverage.

Thursday March 29th
11:05 PM UEFA Champions League Hour

SBS TWO
Monday March 26th
09:30 PM The World Game

Wednesday March 28th
09:40 PM UEFA Champions League - Quarter-final match (1st Leg)

Thursday March 29th
08:30 PM UEFA Champions League Hour

Friday 23rd March
02:30 am The Serie A Highlights Show
03:00 am Arsenal TV Everton V Arsenal
06:00 am Bundesliga Borussia Dortmund V Werder Bremen
08:00 am Bundesliga Weekly Highlights

Saturday 24th March
05:00 am FA Cup Classics Manchester United V West Ham United 4th Round 2003
05:30 am The Serie A Highlights Show

Sunday 25th March
06:00 am Arsenal TV Everton V Arsenal

Monday 26th March
03:00 am Bundesliga Weekly Highlights
10:30 am Serie A Catania V Lazio
12:30 pm The Serie A Highlights Show

Tuesday 27th March
02:30 am FA Cup Classics Chelsea V Arsenal 6th Round Replay 02/03
03:00 am Arsenal TV Arsenal V Aston Villa
07:00 am Serie A Matchday 28: Udinese V Napoli

Thursday 29th March
02:00 am Magic Of The FA Cup Manchester City's Greatest Goals
03:00 am Bundesliga Bayern Munich V Hannover
05:00 am Bundesliga Weekly Highlights



Friday 23-Mar
Eredivisie De Graafschap v Twente 4am
1st Airing

Saturday 24-Mar
Bundesliga Wolfsburg v Hamburg 6:25am
LIVE

Sunday 25-Mar
Scottish Premier League Aberdeen v Inverness 1:55am **LIVE**
Bundesliga Schalke v Leverkusen 4:25am **LIVE**
Ligue 1 Valenciennes v Rennes 6:45am **LIVE**
Ligue 1 Teams TBC 9am 1st Airing
Scottish Premier League Rangers v Celtic 10:55pm **LIVE**

Monday 26-Mar
Eredivisie Ajax v PSV 1:25am **LIVE**
Bundesliga Stuttgart v Nuremberg 3:30am
1st Airing
Ligue 1 Round 29 Teams TBC 5:15am
1st Airing
Primera Division Round 7 Teams TBC 6:55am **LIVE**
Primera Division Round 7 Teams TBC 9:05am **LIVE**
Bundesliga Round 27 Cologne v Dortmund 2pm 1st Airing
Ligue 1 Round 29 PSG v Bordeaux 5:30pm 1st Airing

Wednesday 28-Mar
FA Cup Quarter Final Replay Teams TBC 5:40am **LIVE**
Eredivisie Round 27 AZ v RKC 3:30pm
1st Airing

Thursday 29-Mar
FA Cup Quarter Final Replay Teams TBC 5:40am **LIVE**
Copa Libertadores 2nd Stage Defensor v Chivas 9:40am **LIVE**

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE LIVE
Times listed are 7 minutes prior to kick-offs.

Week 32
Sat Mar 24 Chelsea v Tottenham 11.38 pm Fox 1
Sun Mar 25 Arsenal v Aston Villa 1.53 am Fox 1
Sun Mar 25 Bolton v Blackburn 1.53 am Viewers Choice
Sun Mar 25 Liverpool v Wigan 1.53 am Viewers Choice
Sun Mar 25 Norwich v Wolves 1.53 am Viewers Choice
Sun Mar 25 Sunderland v QPR 1.53 am Viewers Choice
Sun Mar 25 Stoke v Man City 4.23 am Fox 1
Sun Mar 25 Swansea v Everton 6.30 am DELAY
Mon Mar 26 WBA v Newcastle 1.53 am Fox 1
Tue Mar 27 Man Utd v Fulham 5.53 am Fox 1

ENGLISH FOOTBALL LEAGUE
Sat Mar 31 L1: Sheffield Wednesday v Preston 10.30 pm Fox 1
Sun Apr 1 Blackpool v Southampton 2.00 am Fox 1

A-LEAGUE LIVE
Fri Mar 23 Adelaide v Heart 8.00 pm Fox 2
Sat Mar 24 Perth v Victory 9.30 pm Fox 1
Sun Mar 25 Phoenix v Mariners 2.00 pm Fox 3
Sun Mar 25 Sydney v Newcastle 4.00 pm Fox 3
Sun Mar 25 Gold Coast v Brisbane 6.30 pm Fox 3

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Dugandzic says Heart excited for Adelaide and finals series

By Francis Fields

Having opened the scoring in Melbourne Heart's draw against Sydney FC last weekend, the pacey right-footed winger spoke enthusiastically of what to expect of the team leading up to the final round of the regular season away to Adelaide United.

"We've got the assurance that we're in the finals now but we don't want to take it easy. It is a good time to carry on some momentum whether it be Perth or Wellington we're up against", he admitted.

Heart's opponents on Friday are fresh from an important win in the AFC Champions League on Tuesday night against Japanese giants Gamba Osaka. The winger was confident Adelaide's commitments can give the side an added advantage with fresher legs.

"Adelaide will have three days rest leading up to the match with their league season over so we expect them to go out with nothing to lose, especially at home. Having an extra few days definitely helps".

Touching on the interesting statistic on wins away from home, Dugandzic said the close-knit and tight group in the dressing room is a key factor for the challenges coming up that are very important.

"We are all friends off the pitch and that definitely helps on the pitch as well as the season has reflected so

far," he added.

On a personal note, Dugandzic already speaks of an optimistic season into his career with added experience and maturity under his belt.

"Playing under John van 't Schip has been instrumental for me and for all the younger players in the squad for the way we play. It is a massive credit to him for getting us to this stage", said Dugandzic in recognising the hard work imposed by the Dutchman".

In what is only the second year of Melbourne Heart's short existence in the A-League, Dugandzic was also not hiding a hint of excitement on the prospect of finals football.

"Expectations are high when it comes to the finals and whether we play Wellington or Perth, the atmosphere at either those two stadiums are exactly what football is all about. It is also very worthy for a lot of our other younger teammates to benefit from this experience", reflected the 22 year-old with seven goals to his tally this season.

"We are not necessarily in a situation where we can sit back and speculate, we have to approach our matches the same way, with an attacking philosophy and we are want to keep taking every match seriously and we are aware, it could be the end if we lose. Hopefully it should get us the results".



Mate Dugandzic celebrates with Heart teammates after scoring against Sydney FC last weekend. Photo: ANITA MILAS



KATSA'S KORNER

With George Katsamboukas

Ladies and Gentlemen, and Bald Headed Club Powerbrokers, the 2012 VPL Season is once again upon us, and in a week's time, the rest of the Leagues will also kick off in earnest.

Prior to previewing the VPL, over to the A-League and we go, where the off field goings on of the last few months have overshadowed what has been occurring on the fields of play.

The words Melbourne and Victory have become mutually exclusive of late, and the Scorer picked up the wicket of Mehmet Durakovic a few months ago, who's contract was terminated by the Victory Board.

Enter the new Manger Jim Magilton, fresh from his Assistant Manager's Role with Shamrock Rovers, who was tasked with ensuring that Melbourne Victory made the Finals. After promising much he suc-

cessfully completed none of the above, picking up 2 wins in 12, and then launching a scathing attack on his current Player Roster after their recent insipid performance against arch rivals Sydney FC a few weeks back, where....

Magilton promised to visit Buntings and purchase a very large broom to sweep out certain unnamed members of the current Victory Squad.

He certainly surprised many with his Pubic airing of what he thought of his Squad, I for one believe that this should be done behind closed doors, as opposed to making it Public.

Word around Town is that the Melbourne Victory Board are considering offering Magilton a new 2 year contract, if this is the case, Australia certainly lives up to it's reputation of being the Lucky Country, offering all and sundry plentiful opportunities.

SBS Heavy Weights Les Murray and Craig Foster's recent articles also question both Magilton's recent public comments about the Victory Squad as well as his possible 2 year contract with the Melbourne Team.

And if the above was not enough, enter Billionaire Gold Coast United Club Powerbroker Clive Palmer, who launched a scathing attack on the FFA, who then in turn, removed his Licence.

Not to be outdone, Palmer then formed Football Australia with the initial aim of forming a break away League, however this was soon watered down by its CEO, Archie Fraser, and it now appears that this new group will act as a lobby group that will address the running of the game here Nationally, acting as a Lobby Group.

Palmer also sought an injunction against the FFA's decision to remove his license, which he

lost and this blemished his prized record of 68 litigations for 68 wins. Over to the local scene we go, and the VPL kicks it's 2012 Season this weekend.

Clubs have been busily stocking up on both Coach's and Players, with the intention of lifting the Cup at Season's end, and more importantly, avoiding the dreaded drive towards the Westgate.

South Melbourne has recruited heavily adding numerous Players, as well as securing the services of Peter Tsolakis as their Coach, who was previously at Northcote City.

Goran Lozanovski has taken the reins at Northcote, whilst the Oakleigh Canons, following a very successful Season last year where they reached the Grand Final under rookie Coach Arthur Pappas, have opted to appoint another relatively inexperienced Coach in Huss Skenderovic.

Newcomers to the League are Southern Stars and Moreland Zebras, who will certainly aim to be competitive this year.

Until Next Week

This is Katsa – Just as you have known him

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Harry Armstrong

BLAST FROM THE PAST

With Roy Hay

Herbert 'Harry' Armstrong was born in Birkenhead in 1876 and came to Australia in 1910. He was immediately involved in the game with Williamstown, who were one of the leading teams of that era, winning the league in 1911 and the league and the Dockerty Cup in 1912.

Harry Armstrong became secretary of the Williamstown club by 1912. At some time thereafter he became secretary of the Victorian Amateur Soccer Football Association, working closely with Harry Dockerty, the president. During the Second World War Armstrong virtually ran the game single-handed as clubs folded and amalgamated. He became secretary again in 1948 and tried to drum up more new referees for the game. By then he was a councillor in Williamstown and involved with a host of local organisations. He was made Mayor in 1950-51 and thus was less involved with football, at least nominally. He died in May 1954 and the Reserves Cup was named in his memory. Harry Dockerty said 'No man could have done better' and described him as a great worker for the game. The first winner of the Armstrong Cup under its new name was Moreland.

There were Victorian Cup competitions in the 1880s, the Beaney and George and George Cups among others. In 1909 Harry Dockerty presented the Cup which bore his name until 2004. In 1913 a cup for reserves was begun. It was referred to by various names in the press—Reserves Cup, Reserves Consolation Cup. Thanks to Olwen Kitson, Harry Armstrong's grand-daughter, we have a picture of the Nobels-ICI team in 1940 when they completed a clean sweep of the First Division championship, the Dockerty Cup and the Reserves Cup. Olwen's father, Tom Higgins, played with Nobels, keeping up the family involvement. Tom Higgins had three caps for Victoria against touring teams, Maccabi Tel Aviv in 1939 and Sing Tao from Hong Kong in 1941.

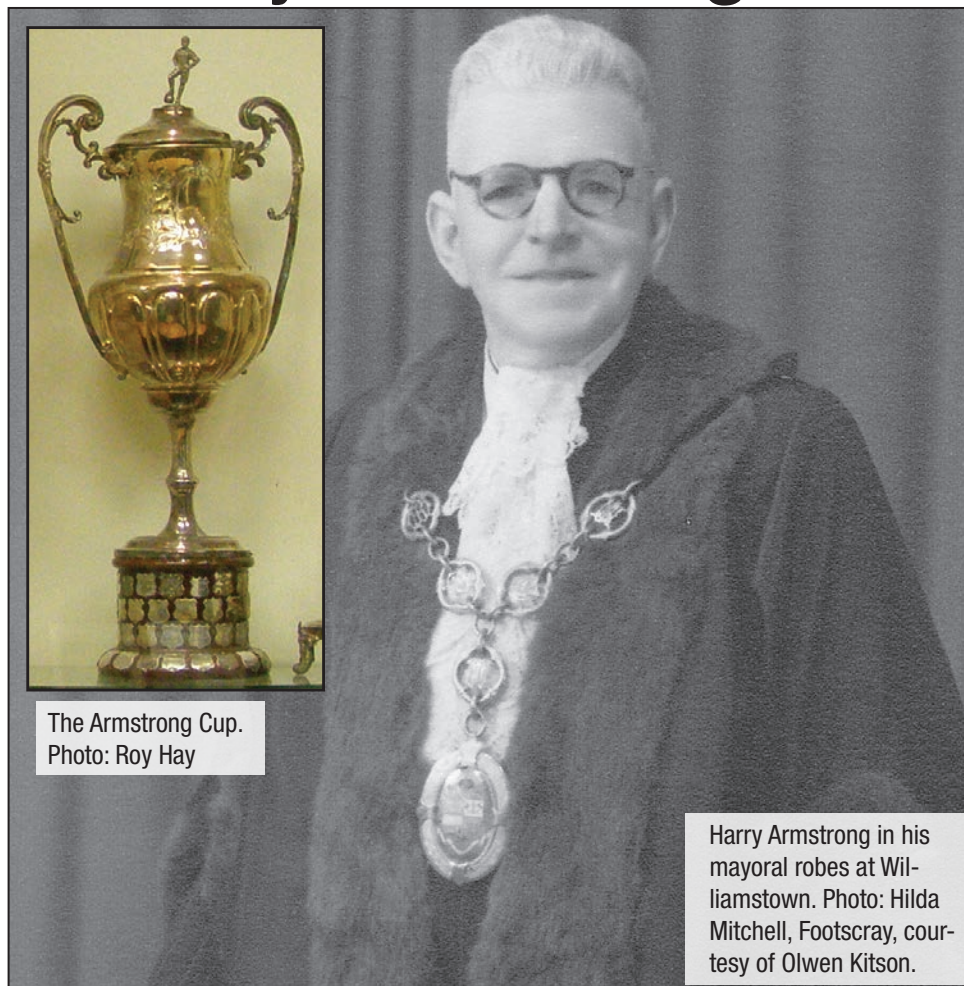
There were gaps in the series of competitions for the Reserves trophy during the First World War from 1915 to 1918, 1927-29 during a major split in Victorian

football, and a couple of years during the depression and during the Second World War, when Harry Armstrong was running the game on his own. Competition picked up in the 1940s and especially when what John Kallinikios calls the 'Soccer Boom' got under way. It was the last throw of the British migrant clubs and the influx of newcomers from Europe was changing the game in Victoria and across Australia. The Dockerty and Armstrong Cups attracted a wide range of entries from across the state. Probably the most popular cup competition in the post-war years was the Laidlaw World Cup between teams of the different nationalities which often drew the biggest crowds. But both Dockerty and Armstrong cups which involved clubs at all levels and from all parts flourished.

Over the years Hakoah has won the Armstrong Cup seven times, South Yarra five times and Box Hill and Ringwood City Wilhelmina have secured the trophy four times. Three time winners include Footscray Thistle, Green Gully, Polonia and Nobels/ICI. John Slade, who played more than 800 games in a long career as a goalkeeper, won three Armstrong Cup medals, two with Hakoah and one with Polonia. In 1984 Dandenong City won its semi-final against Fawkner by two-nil, but then was thrown out of the competition because the club had not entered the Dockerty Cup as well. Fawkner was beaten by Box Hill in the final. Springvale City was the Armstrong Cup winner in 1985, with 'Dutchy' Bosland scoring a hat-trick in a four-nil win over Knox City.

As a reserves competition the Armstrong Cup got less media notice than the Dockerty and Laidlaw cups but for the clubs which competed it was a feather in their caps to knock off the bigger teams or even reach the last stages. Club histories and websites often tell of Armstrong Cup wins. At a time when ideas for a knock-out competition across Australia are being mooted, and when Victoria has reinstituted a state-wide knock-out cup, it is worth remembering that we once had two—one for seniors and one for reserve teams.

Harry Armstrong and his cup



The Armstrong Cup.
Photo: Roy Hay

Harry Armstrong in his mayoral robes at Williamstown. Photo: Hilda Mitchell, Footscray, courtesy of Olwen Kitson.



ICI (Nobels) with all three Victorian trophies in 1940. Tom Higgins centre front row with the ball in his lap. Photo courtesy of Olwen Kitson.

Armstrong Cup (formerly Reserves Cup) winners 1913-1997

- 1913 Burns FC
- 1914 Sandringham
- 1915 Not contested
- 1916 Not contested
- 1917 Not contested
- 1918 Not contested
- 1919 Not contested
- 1920 Not contested
- 1921 Thistle
- 1922 Footscray Thistle A
- 1923 Footscray Thistle A
- 1924 Essendon
- 1925 Brunswick
- 1926 Essendon City
- 1927 Not contested
- 1928 Not contested
- 1929 Navy Reserve
- 1930 Navy Reserve
- 1931 South Yarra
- 1932 Footscray Thistle
- 1933 Royal Caledonian & South Melbourne
- 1934
- 1935 South Yarra
- 1936
- 1937 South Yarra
- 1938 Nobels
- 1939 ICI (Nobels)
- 1940 ICI
- 1941 Not contested
- 1942 Not contested
- 1943 Not contested
- 1944 Not contested
- 1945 Not contested
- 1946 Sunshine United
- 1947 Prahran
- 1948
- 1949
- 1950 South Yarra
- 1951 South Yarra
- 1952 Juventus
- 1953 Footscray City
- 1954 Moreland
- 1955 Juventus
- 1956 Hakoah
- 1957 Polonia
- 1958 Hakoah
- 1959 Polonia
- 1960 Box Hill
- 1961 Wilhelmina
- 1962
- 1963 Box Hill
- 1964 Hakoah
- 1965 St Albans
- 1966 Croatia
- 1967 Port Melbourne Slavja
- 1968 Footscray JUST
- 1969 Ringwood City Wilhelmina
- 1970 Hakoah
- 1971 Ringwood City Wilhelmina
- 1972 Ringwood City Wilhelmina
- 1973 Polonia Maribyrnong
- 1974 North Carlton
- 1975 Hakoah St Kilda
- 1976 George Cross
- 1977 Essendon Lions
- 1978 Green Gully
- 1979 Prahran Slavja
- 1980 St Kilda Hakoah
- 1981 Heideberg United
- 1982 St Kilda Hakoah
- 1983 Green Gully
- 1984 Box Hill
- 1985 Springvale City
- 1986 Prahran City
- 1987 Waverley City
- 1988 Bulleen
- 1989 Box Hill
- 1990 Altona Gate
- 1991 Fawkner
- 1992 Altona Gate
- 1993 Port Melbourne
- 1994 Sunshine Georgies
- 1995 Green Gully
- 1996 Port Melbourne
- 1997 Not contested

Source: VSF Yearbook 2000, p. 158.

at least you felt a part of something really special, to be one of only two teams left out of hundreds, and a chance to pretend you were playing in the equivalent of our very own FA Cup final (junior version of course!).

From the week long build up, to the tension and torture of the butterflies before kick-off, to the memories remain, Cup football should be a staple part of any footballer's playing diet.

Thanks to Roy for shedding light on Harry Armstrong and his Cup. Thanks to Harry for sharing a Cup that touched so many. It all makes so much sense now.

An Editor's cup recollection

Much of my football playing days were spent in the McGoo's at Caulfield City and Frankston Pines, and I too had the privilege of gracing the Armstrong Cup on a couple of occasions.

If your season wasn't going according to plan, then there was nothing like a good cup run to provide some sort of salvation. Sadly for me, we were always bundled out nice and early so I never got the chance to enjoy all the glories of this particular competition, but when I think of a cup competition words like epic and romance and David and Goliath instantly come to mind.

I did actually make it to a cup final once, but that was in the JLMC Cup - which I guess in some ways could be considered the junior equivalent of the Armstrong Cup. I was twelve or thirteen years old and playing at Brighton, and a certain Paul Trimboli - who went on to play for the Socceroos - was also in the team at that time. He was to us like Messi is today to Barcelona. All we had to do was just give him the ball and watch the trophies roll in. I often joke to people that I won more trophies in that two year period when Paul was playing with us than at any other time of my playing 'career'. We even got to meet the Mayor of Brighton who presented us with commemorative guernseys especially made for that particular cup final.

We ended up losing the game 4-3 in extra time to Sunshine Heights after coming back from 3-0 down, but it was an experience I will never forget. For a short period



Green Gully with the Armstrong Cup in 1978. Photo: Les Shorrock. Les Shorrock collection, Deakin University Library.

Merrick's Hong Kong revolution



ERNIE Merrick is at the forefront of the biggest revolution in the history of Hong Kong football and is loving every minute of it.

"I really enjoy the life here, both on and off the park," he said. "Hong Kong is at the centre of trade between East and West. It's very rich in culture with a high standard of lifestyle and the people always seem to be happy and smiling."

He has rented a serviced apartment with wife Kerry who will commute to and from their Melbourne home during this first year of her husband's two-year deal.

There's a real buzz about the place as the government and the Hong Kong Football Association have linked to implement Project Phoenix with the express aim of breathing new life into the local game.

In 2009, Hong Kong's Home Affairs Bureau commissioned a consultancy study to review football in the region and recommend options for the game's development.

That report was published in March 2010 and its recommendations bear striking similarities to those of the 2003 Crawford Report, which ushered in the emergence of Football Federation Australia and the A-League.

Since the report's publication the HKFA has signed an agreement with the Leisure and Cultural Services Department and made a commitment to exercising proper internal controls and to ensuring that public funding will be used in a cost-effective and responsible manner.

Last year the HKFA revised its constitution, introduced independent directors, set limits on their length of service and enhanced the transparency of voting procedures.

The next step was to set out on a worldwide recruiting drive which started with the search for a CEO with extensive sports management experience.

That man turned out to be former Scottish Rugby Union head Gordon McKie. He was appointed on 21 November and on 17 December McKie and the HKFA snared Merrick.

Despite HKFA's early success in its recruitment drive there remains a number of high-profile posts to be filled, among them Technical Director, Head of Commercial and Marketing, Academy Coach, Competitions Officer, Referees Manager and Coach Education Manager.

"We are well down the track of filling

some of these posts," said Merrick. An indication that the most successful coach in A-League history remains very competitive is his decision to create his own key performance indicator of taking Hong Kong into FIFA's top 100 rankings within four or five years. "I didn't have to do that but I wanted to set that as one of our goals," he said. "The FA knows that there's a lot of work to be done and currently we are lying 169th in the world but we want to move up. We have to look at qualifying in three, four, five years for Asian Cups, for Olympics."

"But despite those targets I want short-term results too. I enjoy success."

It's a tall order. Unlike so many of its Asian competitors Hong Kong can't draw on talented professional players from different parts of the globe. Rather it has to concentrate on the local scene – primarily the 10-team First Division.

"There's a young lad at Bayern Munich whose mother is from Hong Kong but he would have to renounce his German citizenship to play for us and I don't expect that to happen. There's another lad playing in Japan," said Merrick.

"I've found a player from Ghana who is very good and he looks like getting his Hong Kong passport."

"One of the problems with getting foreign players eligible to play for you in Hong Kong is that you have to wait for seven years for a passport so a foreigner's career would likely be over before he would qualify to play."

Nevertheless Merrick's men hit the ground running when his national team thumped Chinese Taipei 5-1 in an international friendly last month. The home team dominated the contest from the outset and was 3-0 up in 16 minutes.

Right now Merrick is acting as head coach, technical director and high performance manager and is working with both the senior national team and the under-22 squad.

He is preparing the younger squad for the AFC Under-22 qualifiers in June where they will come up against North Korea, China, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia.

But Merrick won't merely be judged by onfield success. He also will be judged on his ability to establish high performance programs and pathways for elite youngsters.

"One reason I got this job is the combination of my time with the VIS and



Bailey Wright has broken into Preston North End's first team.

the success I had in working in the A-League."

And right now there's no reason to believe that he won't see out this contract and perhaps even extend it if both parties are happy with the progress that is anticipated.

Which means that recent rumours linking him with A-League jobs may be misplaced.

"I keep getting linked with jobs back in Australia but I can tell you that no-one has spoken to me and I certainly haven't applied for any."

He probably hasn't had time anyway, what with instituting and overseeing regular training sessions for two national squads, compiling reports, doing budgets, sifting through intelligence about upcoming opponents, communicating with McKie and the board and talking to journalists pestering him all the way from Australia.

But despite the whirlwind pace he currently operates at he remains upbeat and positive and totally committed to bringing success to Hong Kong football.

Westley gets it Wright
BAILEY Wright achieved a long-held personal goal last weekend when he made his full senior debut for Preston North End.

The Langwarrin 19-year-old played left back in his club's 2-1 away win over Exeter in League One.

And he made an immediate impact judging by the Preston North End website, which raved about his debut.

"Bailey Wright made a great impression in his first start ... The Australian defender played in an uncanny left-back role and did it with distinction ..." the match report stated.

Wright has had a topsy-turvy time at Preston for the last year and his fortunes are indicative of the differing views of managers and how they can affect a youngster's professional career.

Former manager Darren Ferguson rated Wright and offered him a two and a half year contract. At the end of this season Wright will have another year remaining on that deal.

But when Ferguson was replaced by former Hull City manager Phil Brown, Wright's fortunes waned. He was never in the frame during the Brown reign albeit that he was captaining the reserves.

Then the former VIS scholarship holder and Joeys defender switched from central defence to left back after Graham Westley took over in January and he has worked hard to come to terms with his new role.

"I am happy to play anywhere the manager tells me to if it gets me on the pitch. I am adapting to left back and getting used to it," said Wright.

"It is a great boost to your confidence when the manager believes in you," he added pointedly.

And that confidence was evident when Wright again played a full 90 minutes in Tuesday night's battling 0-0 draw away to play-off hopeful Carlisle United.



Ernie Merrick gets accustomed to his new surrounds in HK.

He started at left back and it was his ball over the top in the 13th minute that sent Irish striker Graham Cummins through only for the Preston forward to shoot tamely at Carlisle keeper Adam Collin.

Tempers became frayed and yellow cards to three Preston players resulted in Westley substituting young Danny Devine in the 26th minute fearful that his side would be reduced to 10 men. His replacement, Max Ehmer, took over at left back with Wright switching to a more familiar central defensive position.

Alongside Chris Robertson at the heart of defence Wright turned in a commanding display and one that delighted Westley and his coaching staff.

Wright and his teammates defended well from set pieces while the youngster also effected some crucial clearances and blocked a goal-bound shot from Carlisle striker Lee Miller in the 78th minute.

All in all it's been a tremendous few days in the life of Bailey Wright. Two full senior games. Two fine performances. And after two away matches there are consecutive home games to come where he is certain to receive a rousing reception from the Deepdale faithful.

Off the pitch his club and FFA remain in discussion concerning the size of the training compensation package being sought by Football Federation Victoria for the time Wright spent with the Victorian Institute of Sport program.

Not unusually the matter has dragged on for some time and should no figure be agreed upon then it will be referred to FIFA for judgement.

It also involves three clubs that Wright played for in Melbourne – Langwarrin, Dandenong Thunder and Mornington – albeit that these clubs agreed a compensation package with Preston North End a couple of years back and copies of their signed agreements have been lodged by Preston with the English Football Association.

FFV and FFA dispute the binding nature of those agreements.

Fergie, Shug go way back
SIR ALEX Ferguson casually strolled up to the two young men and said: "So you're the boys from Oz are you?"

The living legend turned to an Old Trafford security guard and told him that both visitors could stay and watch the Manchester United training session that was about to begin. As Ferguson walked away the guard looked stunned.

"He's never said that to me in 20 years," the guard told the Aussie duo. As they say, it's not what you know it's who you know and fortunately for North Caulfield players Josh Braver and Ariel Lashansky they know ex-Melbourne Hakoah legend Hugh ("Shug") Murney.

Ferguson and Murney first met in the early 1960s in their native Scotland when Ferguson was with St Johnstone and Murney was with Morton and their friendship has endured.

"I'll never forget the night he saved me in Glasgow," said Murney.

"We'd been drinking in the Central Station Hotel and later on me and my date fell out. I'd missed the last bus so I started walking back to Johnstone, which is a fair walk and it's pitch black by now."

"About 25 minutes into the walk this car pulled up and Fergie stuck his head out the window and asked me what was going on. He ended up driving me right to my door and I can tell you I was very thankful that he did."

So when Murney recently contacted Ferguson's PA, Helen, and told her about Braver's and Lashansky's pending appearance she was only too ready to help.

The young Aussies phoned her and confirmed a date to tour Old Trafford and when they arrived armed with the letter of introduction that Murney had penned they were accorded VIP status.

From all accounts the North Caulfield lads were thrilled with their visit. As was Murney at the treatment they received from his old pal.

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Victorian Premier League prepares for new season

The Victorian Premier League (VPL) kicks-off this weekend with Moreland Zebras and Southern Stars replacing the relegated St. Albans and Springvale White Eagles. Here is a detailed report on the 2012 squads and a prediction of how each side will do in the upcoming season.

Bentleigh Greens



Bentleigh Greens go into the 2012 season with John Anastasiadis at the helm who took over after eight games. Anastasiadis has made many changes with Melbourne Victory youngsters Lawrence Thomas, Nick Ansell, Paulo Retre, Luke O'Dea and Dado Lokvancic all coming in. The Victory connection continues with Luke Pilkington being retained with Billy Liolios after the midfielder spent the summer season with Melbourne Heart. There is also a Perth Glory connection with Anthony Skorich and Andrija Jukic joining with the already present Scott Bulloch. Captain Wayne Wallace will be key for this season as the current Best and Fairest of the club and will provide experience to a young squad.

Not only do Bentleigh have a squad of youngsters but good youngsters with a couple key regular VPL players like Nick Curtis who joins from Northcote. Bentleigh, on paper is going to be one of many clubs fighting for a finals place.

2012 Bentleigh Greens Squad:

1. Lawrence Thomas, 2. Christian Lar, 3. Joe Calderone, 4. Billy Liolios, 5. Nick Ansell, 6. Evan Batsis, 7. Nick Curtis, 8. Wayne Wallace (C), 9. Anthony Skorich, 10. Scott Bulloch, 11. Phillip Arnold, 12. Paulo Retre, 13. Connor Pain, 14. Aron Wilford, 15. Luke O'Dea, 16. Danny Kelly, 17. Jack Webster, 20. Damir (Dado) Lokvancic, 22. Dom D'Angello, 23. Andrija Jukic, 24. Luke Pilkington, 31. Chris Davies

Dandenong Thunder



Dandenong Thunder under Coach Chris Taylor go into the 2012 season with a strong squad and a very impressive strike force. Thunder

have added Hamlet Armenian and Sean McLroy from Heidelberg United, Canadian Nathaniel Foster as well as former Sydney FC midfielder Adam Casey. Thunder's squad isn't just strong in attack but in mid-field and defence after resigning Matthew Theodore, signing former Hume midfielder Ross Thompson as well as adding former Melbourne Victory youngsters Enes Sivic and Andrew Mullett. Giant defender Bryan Bran also joins from Oakleigh Cannons to provide some height at the back. Zaim Zaneli also joins from South Melbourne to compete with Stuart Webster after South signed Peter Gavalas from Bentleigh Greens.

But a strong side doesn't win trophies without discipline and a good coach. The main question of the season is whether Chris Taylor can discipline his side so Thunder can have a real shot at the title without a points deduction like in 2011.

2012 Dandenong Thunder Squad:

1. Stuart Webster, 2. Enes Sivic, 3. Andrew Mullett, 4. Brendon Elmazovski, 5. Bryan Bran, 6. Ross Thompson, 7. Liam Kearney, 8. Mathew Theodore, 9. Veton Korcari (C), 10. Feston Azizi, 11. Iqi Jawadi, 12. Tim Mala, 13. Shane Rexhepi (VC), 14. Craig Elvin, 15. Fitim Ibraimi, 16. Shain Elmazi, 17. Hamlet Armenian, 18. Liam Ryan, 19. Nathaniel Foster, 20. Luke Sherbon, 21. Zaim Zaneli, 22. Sean McLroy, 23. Denis Shabanovski, 24. Adam Casey

Green Gully Cavaliers



Defending VPL champions Green Gully Cavaliers go into the 2012 season with a strong squad after adding Ante Cicak from Oakleigh Cannons and exciting forward Ederaro



Green Gully will be aiming to clinch a third VPL crown in a row and a record 10th title. Photo: DANIEL FLIS

Osagie from Heidelberg United. But they have also resigned Melbourne Heart goalkeeper Nikola Roganovic who has won the VPL Championship in the past four seasons, twice with Altona Magic and in the last two seasons with Green Gully. Gully regulars Jeffrey Fleming, Graham Hockless, Andy Vargas and Matthew Sanders plus many more have all been retained.

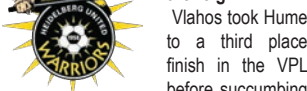
Former Brisbane Roar and Melbourne Knights midfielder Danny Tiatto has also predicted that Gully will go back-to-back-to-back. Gully are definitely going to be a huge contender for the VPL 2012 crown even if they start slowly. They are known to start slow then go on a huge win streak to take out the title and that may well happen once again.

2012 Green Gully Squad:

Hamid Basma, Muhamed Chawk, Ante Cicak, Christopher Dib, Cameron Drake, Stephen Downes, Brent Fisher, Jeffrey Fleming, Jason Hayne, Graham Hockless, Mathew Hume, Daniel Jones, Rhys Keane (GK), Nikola Roganovic (GK), Mile Medjedovic, Jonathan Munoz, Joel Nikolic, Ederaro Osagie, Scott Robson, Mathew Sanders, Andy Vargas, Michael Ofarrell (GK)

Heidelberg United

Heidelberg United go into the 2012 season with former Hume Coach, Andy Vlahos at the reign.



Vlahos took Hume to a third place finish in the VPL before succumbing to Oakleigh in the finals. Heidelberg have also lost many players but Vlahos has brought in a few new faces. Osagie Ederaro, Hamlet Armenian and VPL Goalkeeper of the Year Griffin McMaster have all left. But Vlahos has retained U21 Player of the year Even Christodoulou, Saso Alexovski, Leslie Doumbalis and the Warriors have brought in Melbourne Heart goalkeeper Sebastian Mattei, Nik Tzioulis from Northcote and Sebastian Petrovic from South Melbourne.

Vlahos also remains a registered player but at 35 it still remains how many games the veteran winger will play. But Heidelberg can definitely use the former Melbourne Victory player's coaching techniques which almost took Hume over the line last season. Heidelberg will be in around the finals race and might also push for the VPL crown.

2012 Heidelberg United Squad:

Saso Alexovski, Mitchell Bissingier, Jonathan Bounas, Davide Cardamone, Evan Christodoulou, Con Dimitropoulos, Leslie Doumbalis, Zois Galanopoulos, John Lazaridis, Sebastian Mattei (GK), Chris May, Andrew Nabbout, Arthur Papadopoulos, George Papadopoulos, Saranti Parisos, Sebastian Petrovic, Oliver Rowland, Peter Sawan, Ahmet Turgur, Nikolaos Tzioulis, Andrew Vlahos

Hume City



Hume City go into the 2012 season with former goalkeeper Lou Acevski as their manager after retiring at the end of last season.

Acevski took over at the end of last season after Andy Vlahos walked out and in 2012 Vlahos has taken over at Heidelberg United. Vlahos wasn't the only one to leave Hume as Adam Nakic joined the Melbourne Victory Youth side, Ross Thompson joined Dandenong Thunder and leading goal scorer Richie Cardozo joined Austrian side LASK Linz. But Hume have recruited well with former Gold Coast United youth defender Ben Harrison being joined with Chilean Jose Guerrero, former Perth Glory midfielder Howard Fondyke and Englishman Nick Hegarty.

But Hume are expected to struggle with a rookie coach and a couple major changes. Hume will also play this season at BT Connor Reserve in Reservoir, home of Preston Lions as Broadmeadows Valley Park is being renovated.

2012 Hume City Squad:

1. Chris Oldfield (GK), 2. Adam Centofanti, 3. Ben Harrison, 4. Isyan Erdogan (C), 5. Steven Pace, 6. Serdar Pir, 7. Atilla Ofli, 8. Jose Guerrero, 9. Pece Siveski, 10. David Chick, 11. Nick Hegarty (VC), 12. Jarryd Barnes, 15. Zoran Petrevski, 17. Phillip Riccobene, 18. Evan Van Der Byl (GK), 19. Slave Bosinovski, 20. Archie Tomic, 22. Howard Fondyke, 24. Karan Gill, 37. Bobby Vidinovski, 41. Cem Cil

Melbourne Knights



Melbourne Knights under Paul Magdic go into the 2012 season after retaining a key core group of players from last season

with Ryan Filipovic, Adam Zilic, Tomislav Uskok, Josip Kozic, Craig Sweeney and Jacob and Anthony Colosimo. But they lack a couple key players. Other Jacob Colosimo they are lacking a striker and a VPL class goalkeeper. However they have added Melbourne Victory youngster Jake Nakic, who has recently returned from nine months out with a hip injury, and Louis Fenton from relegated St. Albans. Knights though decided this season to promote a few youngsters like Stefan Baricevic and Anthony Boras and Brandon Zezovski to the first team rather than recruiting from elsewhere like their rivals, a move which may pull off or may not but may well be worth it. If you were to compare Knights squad with their rivals they can't expect to win a finals birth but after all it is Melbourne Knights.

2012 Melbourne Knights Squad:

1. Aaron Romein, 2. Hrvoje Sibenik, 3. Ryan Filipovic, 4. Adam Zilic, 5. David Kustura, 6. Tomislav Uskok, 7. Shaun Romein, 8. Craig Sweeney, 9. Jacob Colosimo, 10. Josip Kozic, 11. Anthony

Colosimo, 12. Shayan Alinejad, 13. Anthony Boras, 14. Stefan Baricevic, 15. Louis Fenton, 16. Marjan Cvitkovic, 17. Joseph Franjic, 18. Brandon Zezovski, 19. Yusuf Yusuf, 20. Nik Oblak, 21. Matt Hrstov, 22. Chris Talajic, 23. Jake Nakic, 24. Ben Surey

Moreland Zebras



The Moreland Zebras go into the 2012 VPL season after winning promotion from State League One as Whittlesea Zebras.

After a name change the squad has strengthened under Coach Dominic Barba. In comes 2011 VPL Goalkeeper of the year Griffin McMaster, former South Melbourne and Melbourne Victory midfielders Daniel Vasilevski and new Skipper Carl Reccia. The Zebras have also added former Brisbane Roar and North Queensland Fury midfielder Chris Grossman. Leading goal scorer of last season Vincent Faherty and Stuart Nicholson will provide a threat up front with Steven Weir also joining from South Melbourne. Zebras have also added Korean midfielder Jungho Kim and have retained former AIS product Ersin Kaya.

With an experienced coach in Barba and some strong recruitment the Zebras are going to be another side in around the finals and pushing for the title.

2012 Moreland Zebras Squad:

1. Griffin McMaster (GK), 2. Chris Grossman, 3. Ray Lally, 4. Will Abbot, 5. Danny Radjoacic, 6. Jole Delev, 7. Stuart Nicholson, 8. Carl Reccia, 9. Vincent Faherty, 10. Daniel Vasilevski, 11. Steven Weir, 12. Reardo Luka, 13. Brandon Defina, 14. Jungho Kim, 15. Ersin Kaya, 16. Michael Mazzarella, 17. Ralph Napoli, 18. Nelson Salvatore, 19. Jacob Ihnatisin, 20. Nace Kosmac, 21. Phil Petrovski (GK), 22. Sayeed Reza

Northcote City



Northcote go into the 2012 season after the departure of key players and their coach Peter Tsolakis who moved to South Melbourne.

Tsolakis also lured Captain Trent Rixon and the Trifiro Brothers, Glen and Jason to Lakeside Stadium. Nick Curtis, Nick Tzoulis and club legend Harry Kinigopoulos also left for Bentleigh Greens, Heidelberg United and Malvern City respectively. Despite losing leading goalscorer Rixon Northcote brought in Milos Lujic from Altona Magic and Matthew Demo from St. Albans to boost their attacking force. Pasquale Vizzari and Alex Rojas joined from Green Gully and Bentleigh Greens respectively to replace the Trifiro brothers.

Tsolakis' assistant, Goran Lozanovski takes over the helm at John Cain Memorial Park but hasn't been in the manager's seat since the 2010 season with Bentleigh but is respected highly after representing the Socceroos on nine occasions and

Round One Fixtures

8:15 PM Fri 23/Mar
Bentleigh Greens v Green Gully
Kingston Heath Soccer Complex -

3:00 PM Sat 24/Mar
Northcote City v Richmond
John Cain Memorial Park

5:00 PM Sat 24/Mar
Dandenong v Southern Stars
George Andrews Reserve

5:00 PM Sun 25/Mar
South Melb v Moreland Zebras
Lakeside Stadium

6:00 PM Sun 25/Mar
Melbourne Knights v Hume City
Knights Stadium

6:00 PM Sun 25/Mar
Heidelberg United v Oakleigh
Olympic Park

leading Preston Lions to the 2007 crown. It is doubtful that Northcote can challenge for the finals after losing some key players. It will come down to what Lozanovski can do with the squad.

2012 Northcote City Squad:

1. Chris Petropoulos (GK), 2. Adrian Chiappetta, 3. Kristian Konstantinitis, 4. Antoni Jankovski, 5. James Stefanou, 6. Zane Sole, 7. Jonathan Voulgaris, 8. James Kalifatidis, 9. Milos Lujic, 10. Alex Rojas, 11. Pasquale Vizzari, 12. Hayden D'Agostino, 13. Ricardo Gonzales, 14. Quinn Macdonald, 15. Matthew Demo, 16. Dean Piemonte, 17. George Mcheilleh, 18. Aaron Ward, 19. Parys Okai, 20. Luke Gavalas (GK), 21. Paul Savio, 22. Chris Di Bartolo, 23. Alvaro Carrillo, 24. Charlie Treacy (GK), 25. Darcy Vickery (GK), TBC. Bradley Treloar

Oakleigh Cannons



Oakleigh Cannons go into the 2012 VPL season without inspirational coach Arthur Pappas who has since taken over the Newcastle jets

Youth side.

Huss Skenderovic is his replacement. Skenderovic worked under Michael Chatzitirifonos at Richmond SC and has coached many junior football aged groups. But would Skenderovic be able to handle the job of a manager of a VPL side? We will have to wait and see. Cannons have been able to hold on to the majority of the squad from last season which were defeated in the VPL Grand Final in Extra-time against Green Gully. Peter Zois remains Captain and first choice goalkeeper. Ramazan Tavsanoglu, Frankie Lagana, Hayden Doyle are joined by new comers Goran Zoric and Daniel Dragicevic and will be welcome add-ons to the midfield. Melbourne Heart due Jeremy Walker and Craig Goodwin have also been retained with new forward Zac Walker. New Zealand forward Caleb Rufer joins from Sydney FC's youth side and happens to be the son of former Oceanic player of the year Wynton. Oakleigh definitely have the squad to compete for a finals position but in Skenderovic the Cannons may struggle with an inexperienced VPL coach.

2012 Oakleigh Cannons Squad:

Peter Zois (GK), Steven Gray, Ramazan Tavsanoglu, Jamie Cumming, Jeremy Walker, Ari Drakos, Bonel Obradovic, Frankie Lagana, Luke Walker, Hayden Doyle, Shaun Ontong, Craig Goodwin, Goran Zoric, Ricky Diaci, Jesse Kmcevic, Zac Walker, Daniel Dragicevic, Caleb Rufer, Ashley Savanah, Munyar Nyadzayo, Laurent Coralie, Nikolas Roberts, Daniel Neesham (GK)

Richmond SC



Richmond Soccer Club go into the 2012 season without making too many changes to their squad. Michael

Chatzitirifonos has added Liam Cannell, Tom Milardovic and Daniel Visevic from relegated St. Albans with Steven Topalovic joining from South Melbourne. The latter three have already played for Richmond in the past so Chatzitirifonos has stuck with some familiar faces. Chatzitirifonos has also kept the core of the squad with Michael Ferrante, Stjepan Gal, Erhan Karahan and Nick Marinos. The Eagles have also retained Davey van 't Schip, son of Melbourne Heart manager John.

Richmond are another side which probably won't go for the title but may have a chance to sneak into the finals.

2012 Richmond SC Squad:

Jonathan Beamish, Devon Bonne, Liam Cannell, Michael Catalano, Mate Eterovic, Michael Farnha, Michael Ferrante, Stjepan Gal, Didier Imbert, Erhan Karahan, Josh Kweifio-Okai, Nick Marinos, Tom Milardovic, Scott Muirhead, Timmy Purcell, Sam Shepherd, Jonny Stahl, Steven Topalovic, Davey van 't Schip, Andrew Viola, Daniel Visevic, Oscar Vonk

South Melbourne



South Melbourne go into the 2012 season with a very strong squad and a great coach in Peter Tso-lakis who won the Mirabella Cup with

Northcote City last season.

Tsolakis has brought Trent Rixon, the Trifiro brother, Jason and Glen as well as Gianni de Nittis to the newest VPL facility, Lakeside Stadium. Peter Gavalas also joins from Bentleigh Greens and will compete with Jason Saldaris, who comes from Perth, for the goalkeeper's kit. Englishman Luke Byles strengthens the backline after joining from Heidelberg United and Brad Norton also arrives from A-League side.

Although many players have joined South still have Tom Matthew, Rhodri Payne and Captain Steve O'Dor, Kyle Joryeff and Fernando.

South will definitely be a title contender with a good coach and a great squad. But will the high expectations of the club and fans be too much of a burden for the squad? We will have to wait and see.

2012 South Melbourne Squad:

1. Peter Gavalas (GK), 2. Tom Matthews, 3. Rhodri Payne, 4. Steve O'Dor, 5. Dimi Tsiaras, 7. Joe Keenan, 8. Dimi Hatzimouratis, 9. Trent Rixon, 10. Glen Trifiro, 11. Brad Norton, 13. Luke Byles, 14. Andrew Kaine, 15. Fernando, 16. Christian Skok, 17. Matko Budimir, 18. Marinos Gasparis, 20. Gianni de Nittis, 21. Jason Saldaris (GK), 23. Jeff Trifiro, 24. Nick Jacobs, 25. Kyle Joryeff

Southern Stars



Southern Stars go into the 2012 VPL season after coming runners up to the then Whittlesea Zebras in State League 1 last season.

But the VPL season will be a different test. Coach Dean Hennessey brings a great promotion record to the VPL with some good young players like former Melbourne Victory youth player David Storton and Rudvan Saglam. Former Shamrock Rovers defender Pat Sullivan who played in the 2011-12 Europa League and has been training with Melbourne Victory over the offseason also joins to bolster the defence. Since Stars have been just promoted it is unlikely that they will compete for a finals position so they will battle to survive relegation.

2012 Southern Stars Squad:

1. Robert Acs (GK), 2. Darragh Ryan, 3. Pat Sullivan, 4. John Fitzgerald, 5. Luke Fitzpatrick, 6. Alan Mulcahy, 7. Darren Hewitt, 8. Frazer Siddle (GK), 9. Leon Williams, 10. Joe Diorio, 11. Yanni Galanos, 12. David Storton, 13. Halil Gur, 14. Sait Guler, 15. Karl Brown, 16. Alan Kearney, 17. Rudvan Saglam, 18. Ari Ritz, 19. Liam McCormick, 20. Nick Abougelis (GK), 22. Mark Leach, 23. Kerim Tansel, 24. Keiren Fitzgerald

WORK RESTARTS FOR WORLD CUP STADIUM

Latin Wrap



Francis Fields

Construction has recommenced at Beira-Rio Stadium following an eight-month stoppage that had jeopardised the venue's status as a host for the 2014 World Cup.

Bulldozers and workers were back at the construction site in Porto Alegre on Wednesday after a deal was reached on a partnership to renovate the venue in time for the World Cup.

Work was halted last year because Brazilian club Internacional and the construction company involved in the project, Andrade Gutiérrez, were not able to come up with financial guarantees. They reached a partnership agreement this week after months of negotiations, ensuring the stadium will be finished by the end of 2013, as initially planned.

Beira-Rio will host five World Cup matches, including one in the second round.

The difficulties in signing the partnership had been worrying World Cup organizers, and the Beira-Rio Stadium was in danger of being dropped as a tournament venue. That would have left Porto Alegre having to find a new venue.

"We sealed the partnership with one of the biggest construction companies in the world," Internacional president Giovanni Luigi said. "I am thankful to everyone who helped this end the best way possible. Now the future is ahead of us. The World Cup is ours."

Internacional rival Gremio has been building a new arena in Porto Alegre, and many wanted that venue to replace the Beira-Rio Stadium for the 2014 World Cup.

The arena, built following FIFA standards, is nearly 60 percent complete and club officials have been saying all along that it will be available for World Cup matches if required.

Organizers are against making a switch this late, however, because the new venue would have to go through FIFA's entire approval process from the start before being allowed to host matches. The Gremio arena will likely be used as a training venue only.

Work at the Beira-Rio is only about 20 percent complete, but Internacional and Andrade Gutierrez said the stoppage didn't change the expected completion time of the project, which remains December 2013, as promised to FIFA.

Cleanup work will be begin in the first few days, but about 1,500 workers will be at the construction site once the renovation project is at full steam.

A FIFA team inspecting the host cities earlier this month found an empty construction site when they visited the Beira-Rio Stadium, but football's governing body didn't publicly express concern with the situation at the stadium. FIFA President Sepp Blatter said last week after a visit with the local



Santos youngster Neymar has reportedly signed initial documents for a move to Barcelona in 2014



Mario Regueiro celebrates one of his two goals for club side Lanús in Wednesday's Copa Libertadores group fixture

government that he was confident that all venues will be ready in time, including the Beira-Rio.

Internacional, a two-time Copa Libertadores champion, started renovating the stadium by itself, and in 2010 it reached a partnership with Andrade Gutiérrez to facilitate the completion of the project.

Copa Libertadores latest

In the latest Copa Libertadores results on Thursday, Corinthians of Brazil defeated Mexico's Cruz Azul 1-0 with the only goal coming in the 36th minute by Danilo.

Cruz Azul's Fausto Pinto got his marching orders for a second bookable offence in the 71st minute further complicating the Mexican's side chances to grab at least an equaliser.

In Rio de Janeiro, Vasco da Gama defeated Paraguay's Libertad 2-0 with goals from playmaker Juninho Pernambucano and forward Alecsandro, both in the second half. Vasco's win puts them second in Group 5 with 4 points, three behind leaders Libertad.

It was a different outcome in Group 1 for Brazil's Internacional of Porto Alegre managing only a draw away to Bolivia's The Strongest in La Paz. Rodrigo Ramallo got the home side ahead in the 46th minute delighting the home faithful.

Inter fought back and got its reward late into the match on 88 minutes with Gilberto on the scoresheet to share the spoils and a valuable draw in Group 1. The result leaves Internacional, Santos and The Strongest all with 6 points leading the group leaving Peruvian champions Juan Aurich bottom with no points.

On Wednesday, Mario Regueiro scored once in each half as Argentine club Lanús beat Ecuador's Emelec to move into top spot in Group 2 in the Copa Libertadores.

Bolivia's Bolívar defeated Colombia's Junior 2-1 in Group 3 in Wednesday's other match.

Lanús now leads Group 2 with seven points from four matches, two clear of Brazil's Flamengo and three ahead of Paraguay's Olimpia.

Uruguayan forward Regueiro opened the scoring from close range in the 5th minute and, after Emelec missed two good chances, he wrapped up the result from the penalty spot in the 88th after Mariano Pavone was brought down just inside the area.

In La Paz, Bolivia, two long-range strikes helped Bolívar.

Lorgio Álvarez struck a 25-yard right-foot shot from the left side in the 31st minute and, nine minutes later, Jhasmany Campos made it 2-0 with a left-foot freekick from 30 yards.

Carlos Ruiz got one back for Junior in the 69th, finding space and beating the goalkeeper with a powerful shot from 30 yards.

Bolívar remains in second spot in Group 3 with seven points, behind Unión Española of Chile on goal difference. The top two teams in each group advance to the knockout round.

Opinions on Neymar's future

Bahia coach Paulo Roberto Falcão believes the Brazilian national team would improve if Neymar moved to Europe.

The 20-year-old prodigy has reportedly this week been subject of an initial transfer move to giants Barcelona when his contract with Santos is up in July 2014. According to Cadena SER radio, Barcelona have sealed a deal which would see talented young Brazilian striker Neymar join the Spanish club in 2014.

The report claimed the Catalan giants have already paid 14.5 million euros (\$19 million) of the total 58-million-euro transfer fee to the 20-year-old's Brazilian club.

"According to several reliable sources Barça have already paid a quarter of the 58 million euros to Santos to guarantee the transfer of the player," Cadena SER claimed, adding that the date for his transfer was after the

World Cup in Brazil in 2014.

The report added that the decision to seal the deal was taken by the player and his father against the wishes of his agent Wagner Ribeiro.

His current commitment with club Santos has ensured the youngster competes in the Paulista state championship and the prestigious Copa Libertadores. However, Falcão claims that if Neymar was to play in Europe, then he would be able to add new dimensions to his game - which as a result, would benefit the Seleção.

"I think Europe has a capacity, a tactical culture that we do not yet have here [in Brazil]," the 58-year-old told SporTV. "It gives you an understanding of the game."

"I do not know for sure, but for the experience and the culture - speaking from a footballing angle - it would be an advance. "The national team would do better because he (Neymar) would have a different makeup, he would grow in a way that would help a lot.

Anger at offside goal

Controversy brewed in the Argentinean Primera Division last weekend when Colón de Santa Fe were awarded a highly dubious goal when visiting San Lorenzo.

Colón's goal came in the 68th minute, when the linesman flagged for offside. Colón's Federico Higuaín (brother of Gonzalo at Real Madrid) whipped in a cross regardless, which Ariel Garcé harmlessly tapped into the net, assuming play had stopped. However, the referee completely ignored the linesman — and the inactivity of most of the players — deeming the Colón defenders assuming the offside decision and leaving them completely dumbfounded bringing the score to 1-1.

São Paulo tipped for success this year

Luis Fabiano believes São Paulo are much improved side from last season, claiming the players in the squad are now more determined for

success.

The Tricolor have enjoyed a sound start to the 2012 campaign, sitting second in the Campeonato Paulista - one point behind leaders Palmeiras - and through to the second round of the Copa do Brasil.

"Last year, everything was very accommodating," Fabiano told ESPN Rádio. "Today we have players wanting to play for the national team, who have the need to win trophies."

"We're now beginning to fight for each other for big things."

Brazilian boss quits FIFA

Former Brazilian federation chief Ricardo Teixeira has resigned from the FIFA executive committee.

Teixeira's decision was announced by the South American body CONMEBOL, which he represented on the FIFA committee. CONMEBOL published a copy of Teixeira's brief resignation letter, which was addressed to the regional body's president Dr Nicolás Léoz.

In the letter, Teixeira thanks Dr Leoz, CONMEBOL executives and the presidents of South American national associations for their support during his term in office.

He cited "personal reasons" for stepping down. Teixeira had been joined on FIFA's executive committee by fellow South Americans Léoz and Julio Grondona.

Teixeira, 64, resigned last week as head of the Brazilian Football Federation and the 2014 World Cup organising committee on health grounds. He had been in charge of Brazilian football for 23 years but recently came under pressure to resign over allegations of corruption.

In 2001, the Brazilian Congress investigated Teixeira on suspicion of 13 crimes, including tax evasion, money laundering and misleading lawmakers, but no charges were brought. He has also been investigated for allegedly taking kickbacks from a marketing firm that worked closely with FIFA in the

1990s.

He denied all the allegations and has never been convicted of any offence. Teixeira could also point to the highlight of two World Cup victories, in 1994 and 2002.

Teixeira came under fire from within FIFA earlier this month, with secretary general Jerome Valcke expressing concern over the lack of progress on preparations for the 2014 World Cup.

Copa del Pacifico

Chile ensured a friendly 3-1 win over its neighbour Peru in the first of two international friendlies in Arica, on Thursday in the 'Pacific Cup'.

An early goal from forward Esteban Paredes on 6 minutes with a thunderous left-footed drive gave the home side the perfect start in front of a packed Carlos Dittborn stadium. Peru managed to equalise on 21 minutes courtesy of John Galliquio with a well-constructed cross and finish that defeated Christopher Toselli in the Chilean goal.

It was a tough encounter as usual between the two sides, traditionally accountable to the hostilities between the countries. Following a resulting free kick taken by Universidad de Chile's Marcelo Díaz, Peruvian goalkeeper Saúlomón Libman failed to contain an easy cross and opted to punch away which fell directly at defender Enzo Andía to tap in just before the break.

In the second half, both coaches Claudio Borghi and Sergio Markarián made numerous changes to trial different players in what was a local-based squad for both sides. Chile scored a late winner on 86 minutes with a lightning run on the left wing by Eugenio Mena who plays for Universidad de Chile who beat the offside trap and lobbed Libman for a third goal.

The match served as an important preparation for World Cup 2014 qualification commencing later in June. The return leg will be played in Tacna, southern Peru on the 5th of April.

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Messi rekindles Barca hope

LONDON CALLING



With Sam Collins in the UK

With the champions-elect winning 1-0 at the Camp Nou against Albacete - who had lost ten of their previous eleven league games - Frank Rijkaard introduced a little known La Masia product.

Barcelona fans stood to applaud the efforts of Samuel Eto'o, and then welcomed to the field Lionel Messi. The 17-year old had only been on the field a matter of minutes when he found the back of the net following a drooling pass from Ronaldinho - the world player of the year - except it was offside. But then it happened again. Ronaldinho drifted in field, created another mesmerising assist, lofting the ball over the visitor's defence, and Messi, likewise, lofted the ball over the on-rushing keeper Raul Valbuena. This time it was onside. It was a moment of history. Messi became the youngest ever league scorer in the club's history - aged 17-years, 10 months and 7 days. "Goal goal goal goal...." screamed the TV commentators. Sandro Ros-

sell, the future Barca president, thumped the air in joy, as his side went 6 points clear of Real Madrid in the race for the title. The present club president, at the time, Joan Laporta, barely moved. But both of them knew. Both knew that Barca had a future superstar on their hands, and they were right.

That was May 1, 2005. Fast forward just under seven years and Messi is now the top-scorer in Barcelona history. Though, he may have had to wait a little longer had the club not conducted an investigation into the correct number of goals Cesar Rodriguez scored for the Catalans. It was originally thought the Spaniard, who played the club between 1942-1955, netted 235 goals for Blaugrana, but a look into the archives found it was actually 232. And that meant Tuesday night was one in which 24-year old Messi became the most prolific. A hat-trick at home to Granada saw the Rosario-born forward's record stand at: 234 goals in 314 appearances for Barcelona, 54 in 45 games this season. He doesn't even turn 25 until June...

"We are witnessing the best player in every sense," affirmed Pep Guardiola, the Barcelona coach, "He does everything, and he does it every three days." World player of the year in 2009, 2010 and 2011, there is little doubt Messi will lift the

prestigious prize once again this year, but it's team prizes that interest the modest Argentine. "We will never surrender," he told reporters when Barca drew 0-0 at Villarreal in January, and his team-mates listened. Since then, the current Spanish and European champions have won seven of their eight league games, with the only defeat coming at Osasuna - an evening in which Guardiola chose to rest various key players.

Jose Mourinho saw his Real Madrid side drop points at home to Malaga on Sunday night, and now, at the time of writing, Los Blancos reside just five points ahead of Pep's men. A trip to Villarreal - who changed their coach for the second time this season, replacing Jose Molina with Angel Lotina after a last-minute loss at Levante - beckons for Madrid, so their lead should be at 8 points once more, but difficult fixtures still await the 31-time La Liga winners, who are chasing their first league title since 2008. San Mamés (Athletic Bilbao), the Vicente Calderón (Atletico Madrid) and most notably, the Camp Nou, are grounds of which the likes of Ronaldo, Casillas and co have not visited this season in the league. It's why Barca simply can't give up, and despite their coaches' words - "I still think that we won't win the league" - deep down, Guardiola



Lionel Messi's hat-trick against Granada midweek took his tally for Barcelona to 234 and past the club's previous highest scorer, Cesar Rodriguez, who notched 232. The 24-year-old secured the record with this cheeky chip.

will know there is a chance.

Barcelona's remaining fixtures simply don't seem as tough. Aside from the clasico, which takes place in just over a month's time, only this weekend's trip to Mallorca screams of any major concern, particularly given the champions' full-back crisis. Dani Alves' suspension combined with the health problems of Eric Abidal and Adriano's thigh injury, means the journey to the Island on Saturday appears that little bit

tougher. The Iberostar stadium has seen Joaquín Caparrós's side take ten points from the last four games, including a 2-1 win against Atletico Madrid on the weekend.

Mourinho - who 'France Football' announced as the world's highest-paid coach this week - knows his side have to remain focused. The Portuguese has seen his side win a staggering 21 of their previous 23 La Liga games, and yet Barca sit ready to pounce on any more

hiccups.

The Champions League draw last Friday saw Barcelona paired with AC Milan, which could be a fatal league distraction, whilst Real drew Cypriots APOEL. No doubt 'The special one' would have smiled watching that quarter-final tie arise, but with arguably the greatest player to have ever graced football in their ranks, the catalans can still harbour hope of a fourth consecutive league title.

Muamba 'dead' for 78 minutes

Fabrice Muamba was "in effect dead" for 78 minutes following his on-field collapse, the Bolton Wanderers club doctor Jonathan Tobin has revealed.

Doctors say it is too early to predict whether he will play football again.

But Dr Tobin said he is amazed by the 23-year-old's recovery so far.

In an emotional interview, Dr Tobin said: "It was 48 minutes when he collapsed to reaching hospital and a further 30 minutes after that. He was, in effect, dead at that time."

He added: "We were fearing the worst and didn't think we would get the recovery we had. It's incredible."

Muamba suffered a cardiac arrest in Wanderers' FA Cup tie against Tottenham Hotspur at White Hart Lane on Saturday.

Dr Tobin told BBC Sport's Dan Roan how Bolton physio Andy Mitchell was the first to spot the player had collapsed.

The doctor recalled: "He screamed, 'Get on the pitch, get on the pitch'. It was obvious something major was happening."

Dr Tobin said Muamba was given two defibrillator shocks on the pitch, one in the players' tunnel and a further 12 in the ambulance on the way to hospital but none worked.

The doctor said it was only when medics at London Chest Hospital took over that the situation began to sink in. He added: "I went into the corridor and cried."

"This is Fabrice, not someone who has gone down in the street. I know him, know his family, joke with him every day."

Tottenham club doctor Shabaaz Mughal was among those who rushed to Muamba's aid. He said: "He appeared to take a couple of gasps but was then unresponsive."

The pair were further helped by Dr Andrew Deaner, Consultant Cardiologist at London Chest Hospital, who was at the game as a fan, and ran on to the pitch to lend his expertise.

He said: "As soon as I saw them start CPR, something twitched in me. You always hope that, if you have a defibrillator and get there quickly, they will respond to at least two or three shocks. The longer the resuscitation, the less the chances of survival. But this is a very fit 23-year-old and those attending him are trained in CPR."

"If I was ever going to use the term miraculous it could be used here. He has made a remarkable recovery so far."

"Two hours after [regaining consciousness] I whispered in his ear, 'What's your name?' and he said, 'Fabrice Muamba'. I said, 'I hear you're a really good footballer' and he said, 'I try'. I had a tear in my eye."

The consultant added: "We don't want to get ahead of ourselves but, as things stand, his life is not in danger at this time."

"It is early days so it is not possible to say [if he will play again]."

Dr Sam Mohiddin, the Consultant Cardiologist now looking after Muamba, said: "Fabrice has continued to demonstrate positive signs of recovery."

"His outcome has been extraordinary as a result of extraordinary care."

"He has exceeded our expectations but this remains very early in what could be a very lengthy recovery period."

"The critical thing was the rapid, prompt and very effective CPR at White Hart Lane and expertise from the London ambulance service."

"Normal life is within the spectrum of possibility."

— BBC website



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LIONS LEGENDS MATCH

The Traianedes-Micevski Cup takes place this Sunday 25th March at BT Connor Reserve. Entry is Adults: \$10 and Concession/Children: \$5. Preston Lions will take on Altona Magic (KO 4pm) and the reserves will battle it out at 12pm.

The club would also like to advise that there will be a post-match function in the Preston Makedonia Social Club immediately following the Legends Match this Sunday evening. All members and supporters are welcome to attend and catch up and have a drink with the Legends. There will also be a presentation to all the Legends players, and we will have an official Legends Player Jersey framed and signed by all the players going up for auction. This is the ultimate Preston Collectors Memorabilia item, so you won't want to miss out. Bidding will start at \$500 and if you would like to place a bid on this item before the day, email your bid amount and contact details to PLFCsubcommittee@gmail.com

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EPL Wrap

Steven Talevski

Life is more than a game

This weekend in the English Premier League we witnessed that football is not as important as life itself.

Fabrice Muamba fell to the ground midway through the match between Tottenham and his side Bolton as he suffered a cardiac arrest.

The game was rightly called off.

As of Wednesday night Melbourne time, Muamba is in the intensive care at the Heart Attack Centre in the London Chest Hospital.

Bolton Manager Owen Coyle said "His heart is beating without the help of medication but we remain very much at the beginning of a long-term journey for Fabrice and his family."

"I have been in to see Fabrice and we had a brief exchange of words. That will remain private."

"Fabrice is a fighter and his family have shown great strength in this testing time. They have been greatly comforted by the huge amount of support they have received from around the world."

"I'd like to thank all our Wanderers fans who have been in touch, and a special mention must go to our supporters on Saturday who were outstanding, as indeed were Tottenham's."

Support for Muamba has come from world wide from players, fans and the media.

Prior to Premier League games on Sunday fans and players united to a minute applause in support of Muamba before Gary Cahill unveiled a shirt after scoring a goal saying "Pray 4 Muamba" in support of his former team mate.



Fabrice Muamba's collapse during a cup match sent shock waves around the football world.



Tevez sets up a late winner for Man City in the 2-1 win over Chelsea

At the Bernabeu, Spanish giants Real Madrid came out with 'Get Well Soon Muamba' jersey's along with 'Animo Abidal' in tribute to Barcelona footballer Eric Abidal who underwent a liver transplant.

In Italy, Andrea Pirlo dedicated Juventus' win to Muamba while Australian and Everton star Tim Cahill tweeted "This is now a day when football across the World comes together to pray for Muamba. puts everything into perspective. #pray-forMuamba"

Muamba's fiancée, and mother to his three children, Shauna Muamba tweeted "God is in control" and "faith can move mountains."

The other whelming support for him led to her to tweet thanks to everyone praying for her husband.

"Please keep praying for @fmuamba its really helping I can feel it xx," she tweeted.

In light of Muamba's ongoing battle, Bolton's mid-week clash with Aston Villa was postponed.

EPL WRAP

Manchester United was able to stay atop of the English Premier League table as they smashed

bottom placed Wolverhampton Wanderers five nil away from home.

The victory leaves United one point in front of Manchester City who came from behind to defeat Chelsea 2-1.

Manchester City's win also saw the return of Carlos Tevez who made his first appearance in sky blue for the first time since September.

However it was like Tevez had not gone anywhere as he came on as a 66th minute substitute and set up Samir Nasri for City's winner in the 86th minute.

Chelsea's loss meant they dropped five points below the coveted fourth spot as both Arsenal and Tottenham were able to pick up points.

An eighth minute Thomas Vermaelen header was enough for Arsenal to pick up three points away to Everton and leap frog Tottenham by a point into third position on the table after the Spurs could only manage a late point at home to Stoke City with an 90th minute equaliser from Rafael van der Vaart.

Newcastle United kept their slim European Champions league spot alive when they Papiss Cisse found

the top corner of the goal from inside the penalty area to defeat Norwich one nil and leave the Magpies seven points behind fourth spot.

While Liverpool all but kissed their European Champions League spot chance away with an extraordinary 3-2 loss away to Queens Park Rangers after leading two nil.

Queens Park Rangers stunned Liverpool with goals to Shaun Derry in the 77th minute, former Liverpool striker Djibril Cisse in the 86th minute and James Mackie in injury time.

The victory propelled QPR out of the relegation by two points.

Blackburn Rovers also moved five points away from the relegation zone after they defeated Sunderland two nil to finish off March undefeated in the Premier League.

Wigan was able to move from bottom place as they picked up a point against West Bromwich Albion to leap above Wolverhampton on goal difference and leave them last.

In other Premier League results Swansea defeated Fulham while as mentioned previously the clash between Tottenham and Bolton was called off before the half time

whistle.

EPL PREVIEW

The Premier League weekend kicks off with a London derby between Chelsea and Tottenham at Stamford Bridge.

In what will be a tight encounter the result will have massive implications on both teams hopes to secure a Champions League spot for next season.

A Chelsea victory at home could close the gap to two points with Tottenham who currently sit in the fourth Champions League spot.

Newcastle United will also hope to mount their case for European football next season when they face West Bromwich Albion.

Manchester United will look to remain on top of the Premier League fixture when they close out the round of football when they face Fulham. Manchester United will have goal difference in the back of their mind like they did against Wolverhampton as the season comes closer to an end as goal difference looms to be a possible title decider.

Jonny Evens who scored his first goal for United said: "If it goes to the

end of the season, the last thing we want to do is lose the league on goal difference"

"It would be a terrible way to lose it."

Manchester United is currently three goals behind Manchester City, but remains one point in front of their cross town rivals.

Title rivals Manchester City look to keep the pressure on United when they face the tricky task of visiting Stoke City at the Britannia Stadium.

Down the bottom of the Premier League, Wolverhampton hopes to move off the bottom when they visit Norwich at Carrow Road.

Bolton faces an emotional task when they host Blackburn who hopes to keep their good form up which has seen them move out of the relegation zone this past month.

Fellow relegation threatened team Wigan take on Liverpool while Queens Park Rangers hope to stay out of the relegation zone when they visit Sunderland.

In other Premier League fixtures this weekend Swansea hosts Everton and Aston Villa travel to third placed Arsenal.

Problems At The Villa



Robert Davis

Aston Villa are going through somewhat of a transition period at the moment.

As little as two years ago, they found themselves as one of the more desirable teams to watch in the Premier League. A Carling Cup final, their first in almost ten years, a sixth place finish in the league for the third season in a row and a group of players and coaching staff that that looked certain to challenge for a place in the top four in the near future.

Fast forward to present day and things have not quite gone to plan under their American owner Randy Lerner since his takeover of the club in 2006.

England internationals such as Ashley Young, Stuart Downing and James Milner have departed, influential manager Martin O'Neill left at the end of the 2009/2010 season, and attendances at Villa Park are in decline along with the quality of football.

It's been a long time since Villa Park has seen such visibly empty seats and although some of the problems have been self inflicted, no one expected O'Neill to leave when things were going so well. The Northern Irishman, now in charge at Sunderland, demanded more money to spend in the summer of 2010, only to be



Aston Villa seems to have hit a brick wall in recent times. Be prepared, indeed.

told by Lerner that spending had to be cut back after paying out large amounts for players in previous seasons.

With the current state of debts in the Premier League, it was understandable why Lerner wanted to cut costs after pumping so much money into transfers since his takeover (James Milner £12m, Carlos Cuellar £7.5m, Stewart Downing £12m, Ashley Young £9m). O'Neill on the other hand saw it as the perfect time to break into the top four, a disagreement which ultimately saw him leave five days before the start of the 2010/2011 season.

Lerner had a dilemma on his hands at this point. Managers like Martin O'Neill

are hard to come by and will always be a hard act to follow. Villa though were now a desirable club after showing so much promise in previous seasons. Being linked with the likes of Rafa Benitez had Villa fans looking forward to big things. Instead, Lerner plucked for the much cheaper option of managerial mystery man Gerard Houllier, someone who had been out of managing for three years since relinquishing his role in charge French side Lyon in 2007.

The 2010/2011 season was a disappointing one for The Villans which saw Houllier start his reign badly, then leave towards the end of the season due to heart prob-

lems. Gary McAllister took charge for the remaining fixtures and guided Villa to a ninth place finish, helped by the January arrival of Darren Bent for the ludicrous amount of £18m.

As if paying £18m for Bent wasn't enough, Lerner realised he needed a new man in charge after deciding McAllister would not get the job full time.

Enter Alex McLeish. The man responsible for sending Villa's closest rivals Birmingham City down into the Championship and bringing the tall man who's not good with his feet, Nikola Zigic to The Premiership.

Sending Birmingham down clearly wasn't

enough to endear him to the Villa faithful and his appointment was universally disliked amongst the fans at Villa Park, leading to protests outside the ground. The start to his career at Villa was further disrupted by a contract dispute between the two Midland clubs and the sales of star performers Young and Downing.

To McLeish's credit, he purchased the ever reliable Shay Given to replace the departed Brad Friedel and convinced Charles N'Zogbia to reject a host of top sides to join him at Villa. Along with Stephen Ireland returning from an albeit unsuccessful loan spell at Newcastle United and the emergence of promising youth academy players such as Marc Albrighton and Barry Bannan, McLeish looked to have a great platform to build on and rejuvenate a depleted side.

Instead, Villa find themselves languishing in the bottom half of the table, and if not for a current crop of even poorer sides, would find themselves in a relegation battle.

McLeish wasn't known for playing the most luxurious of football at Birmingham (sorry Nikola), a trend which has continued into this seasons campaign with Villa.

So many times is Bent found isolated up front whilst Emile Heskey is asked to provide some of his silky skills down the left and right side of their five man midfield. If Bent isn't getting any service in a game, he isn't able to give anything to the team. A proven goalscorer of Bent's calibre needs constant service. He's not the kind of player that will create something out of nothing, he'll be the player in the box in the right place at the right time and the player beating the offside trap. Without the service to Bent, Villa have an £18m England international striker feeding off scraps and chasing lost causes, leading to his worst return in goals so far

(9 league goals) since his first season at Tottenham Hotspur (8 league goals).

Bent's performance isn't helped by the inconsistent form of N'Zogbia and Ireland. What looks like a creative pairing for McLeish, N'Zogbia has't quite hit the heights he did at Wigan Athletic last season, whilst Ireland is still struggling for form since leaving Manchester City two seasons ago.

Both players thrive on confidence. With McLeish's style of play being quite direct, both N'Zogbia and Ireland find it hard to influence a match. Wigan revolved their team around N'Zogbia and the Frenchman was given much more freedom around the pitch. At Villa, he is forced to stick to the wings and track back when Villa aren't in possession.

Next season will be the making of Alex McLeish's reign at Aston Villa. The former Rangers and Scotland manager has continued to introduce youth players to the senior squad, with the likes of Gary Gardener, Chris Herd and Ciaran Clark making progress alongside Albrighton and Bannan.

The squad still lacks experienced depth though and money will once again have to be spent in the summer to stop the quick slide into the bottom half of the table.

But is it investment into the first team squad that is needed for Aston Villa, or is it an overhaul in the coaching staff and manager? It's hard to see McLeish taking Aston Villa to the heights they reached under O'Neill and Lerner will have to take note on the fall in attendances at Villa Park.

At the end of the season, McLeish may not be given the chance to improve the squad in the summer. Lerner is once again faced with a dilemma before the situation at Villa becomes less of a problem and more of a disaster.



Luca Cetta

Five-star Juve crush Fiorentina

Juventus smashed archrival Fiorentina to rediscover their scoring touch, whilst Milan defeated Parma. The race for third looks murkier as all three clubs dropped points and there were more woes for Inter.

Juventus travelled to Florence with their Scudetto dream in danger of slipping away after four draws from five Serie A matches. Fiorentina's largest crowd of the season turned out for their most important contest and they were encouraged to wear wigs – an insult directed at Juve Coach Antonio Conte.

A bright start from the hosts was extinguished when Mirko Vucinic fired home from outside the area following neat interplay in the final third. Alessio Cerci was shown a straight red card for kicking out at Paolo De Ceglie off the ball and the match was as good as over just 20 minutes in.

Arturo Vidal netted following a Vucinic lay-off and Claudio Marchisio got on the end of a cross to make it three after the break. Andrea Pirlo – who completed 97% of his passes – chipped in the fourth from a tight angle and substitute Simone Padoin completed the five goal rout with a tap-in from close range.

Conte claimed it was the Old Lady's best match of the season, whilst relegation threatened Fiorentina apologised to the fans through President Andrea Della Valle. 1000 fans gathered outside the stadium after the match to hurl insults at the President, Coach Delio Rossi and the players. Interestingly, this is the highest margin of defeat at home for a



It's high fives all round for Juve as it spans Fiorentina 5-0 away.

Serie A side since Palermo's 0-7 capitulation versus Udinese last February. The Coach in charge then? Rossi.

Milan had earlier laid down the marker as they claimed a 2-0 win in Parma. Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored goal number 20 for the season from the penalty spot after Urby Emanuelson's shot was handballed. Parma struck the woodwork twice, but Emanuelson ended any hopes of a comeback shortly after the break when he ran over half the field and danced between Gialloblu defenders, finally rounding goalkeeper Antonio Mirante and slotting into an empty net.

Udinese and Napoli met in a direct showdown for third place at the Stadio Friuli. Giampiero Pinzi and Antonio Di Natale put the hosts in command but on the hour mark Diego Fabbrini was given his marching orders. Udinese were incredulous with the refereeing performance, however Francesco Guidolin will be more worried his side managed to cough up a two goal lead. Edinson Cavani missed a penalty but then scored a brace inside the final ten minutes to ensure it ended 2-2.

Lazio could have moved clear of both but lost against in-form Catania, 1-0. Nicola Legrottaie scored the only

goal with nine minutes remaining, in a match where both sides spurned opportunities.

Roma gave themselves a chance of sneaking into third with a 1-0 win over Genoa. Pablo Osvaldo scored his first goal of 2012 after just three minutes to move the Giallorossi just five points behind their city rival.

Inter tripped up at home to Atalanta, drawing 0-0. Diego Milito saw a first-half penalty saved and Diego Forlan reportedly refused to go on in the second half in the position Coach Claudio Ranieri intended, meaning the tactician introduced Luc Castaignos instead. Ranieri played the incident down later but it all adds up for the Nerazzurri, who are struggling to score goals.

Elsewhere, Bologna twice equalised against Chievo in a 2-2 draw and Maurizio Pinilla scored his first Serie A hat-trick in Cagliari's 3-0 win over Cesena. Both Lecce and Palermo finished the match with ten men in their 1-1 draw, whilst Novara refuses to go down without a fight as they overcame Siena 2-0 in Tuscany.

A potentially pivotal weekend in the Scudetto race is upon us and after facing each other in the Coppa Italia semi final second leg in midweek – a contest

won by Juventus – the two challengers are at home against Inter and Roma respectively.

In Turin, Juventus will aim to put more pressure on Milan when they host old rival Inter. The Nerazzurri are seeking pride and respectability following their continual issues. Juve will be without Stephan Lichtsteiner due to suspension and will be buoyed by their extra time Cup success.

Milan welcomes Roma to the Stadio Giuseppe Meazza and Massimiliano Allegri welcomes back Clarence Seedorf and Mark van Bommel after injury concerns. The Rossoneri will be aiming to keep their four point advantage and take momentum into their Champions League quarter-final first leg with Barcelona during the week. Roma still harbour hopes of finishing third, but only winless Palermo have lost more away games of those in the top half of the table.

Lazio and Napoli are at home to Cagliari and Catania respectively, both seeking the edge in that battle for the final Champions League position. Lazio have lost two in a row and must steady the ship, whilst Cagliari eased immediate relegation fears on the weekend but still have work to do in order to avoid the drop. Napoli's draw in Udine halted a five-match winning streak and they also won through to the Coppa Italia final after an aggregate win against Siena. They will be wary of Catania, who – by taking into account just the second half of the season – are second only to Milan in points collected.

Fellow contender Udinese is away at Palermo, whilst Atalanta entertains Bologna. Parma will look to move away from the drop zone away at bottom club Cesena as Chievo squares off against Siena. Both Genoa and Fiorentina are desperate for the points to appease restless fans and finally Novara takes on Lecce in a crucial relegation clash.

Balkan Wrap



Alex Milic

Serbia

Red Star will take a two goal advantage into the second leg on the Serbian Cup following a 2:0 win at home against arch rivals Partizan. In-front of a sell out crowd of 50,000 fans the home side took full advantage of its chance, opening the scoring in the 19th minute when new signing Milunovic was put through by Evandro. Partizan had more than its share of chances but failed to score when it looked harder to miss. Ilic and Diarra missing easy chances which would go on to haunt them as super sub Kasalica put the ball between Stojkovic's legs with just over ten minutes remaining.

-We had a lot of luck, but tonight we deserved it in front of a full 'Marakana'. This is a really important win for us. The most important thing is the confidence of our players who showed they could beat Partizan. We had five players in our team making their debuts in the derby. Partizan played well in the first half but we also dominated a year ago and we lost. This time the result was the most important thing, 2:0 for us!" – A delighted Robert Prosinecki said.

Despite Partizan dominating the match for large parts and have the better chances, they failed to make the most of it which frustrated their new Manager Avram Grant.

-This was a really weird match for me. In these kind of matches, their aren't many surprises. I believe we played well but we didn't take advantage of our chances. When Red Star went down to ten men, I didn't make any changes as I already had Markovic and Diarra on the field who could have taken advantage of the open space. I believe the win will not have a negative effect on our team, if anything it will be a positive boost for our players." – Partizan Manager Avram Grant said.

Vojvodina will fancy their chances following a goalless first leg against Borac in Cacak in the other Semi-Final. In league action Red Star was too good for BSK winning 4:1 while Partizan also had no trouble getting past OFK Beograd putting four past with no reply.

Red Star welcomes Borac Cacak in round 20 while Partizan is on the road to Hajduk. The 'Black and whites' have a six point advantage over their rivals

with eleven rounds remaining.

Croatia

Dinamo Zagreb is very close to winning its seventh straight Croatian League title following a 2:1 derby win over Hajduk Split which extended their lead at the top to thirteen points. Hajduk did however take the early lead through captain Ante Vukusic but the home side left it to the end to edge out its rivals with a double to striker Ivan Krstanovic sealing a derby win and surely the title.

In mid-week action Beqiraj scored a double for Dinamo in a 2:0 win over Slaven while Hajduk bounced back from the derby defeat to ease past Rijeka with Vukusic grabbing a brace and Caktas adding a third.

Over the weekend Dinamo shouldn't have any trouble against bottom of the table Varazdin while Hajduk welcomes Cibalia. Eight matches remain in the Croatian League.

Greece

The Greek derby was suspended with the Olympiakos leading 1:0 against Panathinaikos. The 'Red and Whites' remain four points clear of the 'Greens' with the surprise being Atromitos which is currently in third position ten points a drift of the leaders.

In the next round of matches, Panathinaikos is on the road to Crete where they will take on mid-table OFI while Olympiakos is up against Asteras.

Fantastic news for all football fans and lovers of the beautiful game with the news that the Greek giants Olympiakos will be coming down under to take on Melbourne Victory on April 19th. This is a must for all football fans of Australia.

Turkey

In the derby of Turkish football the points were shared as Fenerbahce blew a 2:0 lead against rivals Galatasaray. First half goals to Sow and Alex gave the home side the bumper two goal advantage but the league leaders were not fiving up without a fight as Elmander scored just before the break. The equaliser came with less than ten minutes remaining, Hakan Balta the hero for the away side, salvaging a point. Gala remains nine points clear at the top of the standings while Fener can look at this as a huge missed opportunity in the title race.

Beskitas overpowered Manisaspor 4:1 with goals to their Portuguese imports Ricardo Quaresma who scored two, Manuel Fernandes and Hugo Almeida. Fenerbahce takes on fourth placed Bursaspor over the weekend while Galatasaray third placed Trabzonspor in two big matches.

Messi Breaks The Records... Again



Pepe Lopez

As Barcelona reduced the La Liga lead that Real Madrid has over the Catalan team to 5 points, with an entertaining 5-3 victory over Granada, it was Leo Messi, who at just the age of 24, broke the club's all time goalscoring record of 232 goals. The player, who is now the highest paid in football, earning over \$800,000 a week, still has at least 10 years of football ahead of him, and barring serious injury will no doubt be remembered along side or even ahead of the greatest players of all time, Argentina's Diego Maradona and Brazil's Pele.

After the match, Barca Coach Pep Guardiola was quoted as saying: "You have few players who dominate like this, but he does it. You can compare him perfectly to (Basketball's Michael) Jordan.

The day that Leo Messi overcame Cesar, we've had a game from that era. Leo has entered history. Those who knew Cesar have told me that he was exceptional."

Leo Messi overtook former Barca great Cesar Rodriguez, as the club's all time top goalscorer.

"I want to thank the team for overcoming all adversity and this guy who is continuing to make history. It's all been said before about Messi. He doesn't only score goals, he scores great goals; each one is better than the last. We are seeing the very best in action. I'm sorry for those who try to take his throne but this kid is different, better, we are excited to have him."

The widow of Cesar Rodriguez was thrilled to see Messi break her husband's scoring record: "I'm very happy Messi surpassed my husband because Messi is a very good person, just like my husband was. It is an honour that Messi overtook Cesar. He's a phenomenon."

Fellow teammate Gerard Pique, went a step further and hailed Leo Messi as the greatest footballer of all time on Barcelona's official web-site: "It's a pleasure to be in the same generation as him, I believe he's the best player in

the history of the sport. I've been lucky enough to be on the same team as him, I consider myself privileged. It doesn't matter where he plays, whether it's cold or hot, he always proves that he's the best."

La Liga Wrap

Jose Mourinho was sent to the stands and saw two of his players sent off as Real Madrid were held 1-1 by Villarreal in La Liga on Wednesday.

Villarreal kept out their visitors throughout the first 45 minutes of the match at Estadio El Madrigal, but fell behind to a Cristiano Ronaldo goal two minutes past the hour mark.

The Portugal international played a one-two with Mesut Ozil, before side-stepping Villarreal goalkeeper Diego Lopez Rodriguez to put Real 1-0 up.

The lead lasted until the 83rd minute, when veteran midfielder Marcos Senna curled home a free-kick to draw the home side level.

Mourinho was sent to the stands by referee Jose Luis Paradis Romero, who deemed the Real coach to have sarcastically applauded the decision to award Villarreal the set piece.

Worse was to the follow for the away

team.

Centre-back Sergio Ramos, making his 300th appearance for Real, followed through on Nilmar with an elbow, and received his marching orders for a second bookable offence.

Just moments later, Oezil received a straight red card, apparently for showing dissent to referee Romero. After previously enjoying a run of 11 consecutive La Liga victories, Real have now drawn twice in succession, with their lead over second-placed Barcelona shrinking to six points.

Also on Wednesday, bottom side Real Zaragoza managed an unlikely 2-1 win away to third-place Valencia.

Despite their numerical disadvantage, Apono levelled with a penalty in the 30th minute.

Athletic Madrid overcame Athletic Bilbao 2-1 at home, thanks to a brace from Colombia international Radamel Falcao.

Levante earned an important victory in their bid to earn Champions League qualification, as they defeated 10-man Real Sociedad 3-1 away from home.

Finally, Mallorca twice gave up the lead in their match away to Sporting Gijon, before Alvaro Gimenez's 77th-minute goal sealed a 3-2 win for the visitors.



Robert Prosinecki

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ENGLAND EPL



	Last5games Most recent first									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts		
1 Manchester United	29	22	4	3	73	27	+46	70	W W W W W	
2 Manchester City	29	22	3	4	71	21	+50	69	W L W W W	
3 Arsenal	29	17	4	8	58	39	+19	55	W W W W W	
4 Tottenham Hotspur	29	16	6	7	53	35	+18	54	D L L L W	
5 Chelsea	29	14	7	8	49	34	+15	49	L W L W L	
6 Newcastle United	29	13	8	8	41	41	+0	47	W L D D L	
7 Liverpool	29	11	9	9	35	29	+6	42	L W L L L	
8 Swansea City	29	10	9	10	34	34	+0	39	W W W L L	
9 Sunderland	29	10	7	12	36	33	+3	37	L W D L L	
10 Everton	29	10	7	12	28	32	-4	37	L L W D W	
11 Stoke City	29	10	7	12	28	40	-12	37	D L W W L	
12 Fulham	29	9	9	11	37	40	-3	36	L L W W W	
13 West Bromwich ...	29	10	6	13	35	38	-3	36	D L W W W	
14 Norwich City	29	9	9	11	39	46	-7	36	D L L L W	
15 Aston Villa	28	7	12	9	31	35	-4	33	W D D L L	
16 Blackburn Rovers	29	7	7	15	42	60	-18	28	W W D L W	
17 Queens Park Ra...	29	6	7	16	32	50	-18	25	W L D L W	
18 Bolton Wanderers	28	7	2	19	31	57	-26	23	L W L L L	
19 Wigan Athletic	29	4	10	15	25	54	-29	22	D D L D W	
20 Wolverhampton ...	29	5	7	17	30	63	-33	22	L L D L L	

GERMANY Bundesliga



	Last5games Most recent first									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts		
1 Borussia Dortmund	26	18	5	3	53	16	+37	59	W D W W W	
2 Bayern München	26	17	3	6	64	17	+47	54	W W L W D	
3 Borussia M'gla...	26	15	6	5	39	16	+23	51	W D L D W	
4 Schalke 04	26	16	2	8	58	34	+24	50	W W L L W	
5 Bayer Leverkusen	26	11	7	8	39	34	+5	40	L L W W W	
6 Werder Bremen	26	11	6	9	40	39	+1	39	L W L L W	
7 Hannover 96	26	9	11	6	34	36	-2	38	W L D L W	
8 Stuttgart	26	10	6	10	43	34	+9	36	W D W W L	
9 Wolfsburg	26	10	4	12	34	47	-13	34	W W D L L	
10 Nürnberg	26	9	4	13	25	37	-12	31	L L W W W	
11 Mainz 05	26	7	9	10	38	41	-3	30	L W L W D	
12 Hoffenheim	26	7	9	10	29	37	-8	30	L L D W D	
13 Köln	26	8	4	14	33	50	-17	28	L W D L L	
14 Hamburger SV	26	6	9	11	30	48	-18	27	L L D L L	
15 Augsburg	26	5	11	10	27	40	-13	26	W D D W L	
16 Freiburg	26	6	7	13	33	53	-20	25	W D W L D	
17 Hertha BSC	26	5	8	13	26	47	-21	23	L L W L L	
18 Kaiserslautern	26	3	11	12	17	36	-19	20	L D D L L	

THE CHAMPIONSHIP



	Last5games Most recent first									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts		
1 Southampton	38	22	9	7	70	35	+35	75	W W W D W	
2 Reading	38	21	7	10	53	33	+20	70	L W D W W	
3 West Ham United	37	19	11	7	57	36	+21	68	D D D D W	
4 Brighton & Hov...	38	17	10	11	47	39	+8	61	L W D D D	
5 Blackpool	38	16	12	10	65	53	+12	60	D W L L D	
6 Middlesbrough	37	16	12	9	44	41	+3	60	D L L W W	
7 Birmingham City	37	16	11	10	59	40	+19	59	L W L D D	
8 Cardiff City	38	15	14	9	56	49	+7	59	D D L W D	
9 Hull City	37	16	10	11	37	30	+7	58	L D W D D	
10 Leeds United	38	15	9	14	58	57	+1	54	L D W D L	
11 Crystal Palace	37	13	14	10	37	32	+5	53	W D D D W	
12 Leicester City	37	14	10	13	54	47	+7	52	D W L L W	
13 Derby County	38	15	7	16	41	50	-9	52	L W W L W	
14 Ipswich Town	37	15	6	16	60	65	-5	51	W W D D W	
15 Watford	38	13	12	13	44	54	-10	51	W D W D W	
16 Burnley	37	14	7	16	48	45	+3	49	L D D L L	
17 Peterborough U...	37	12	8	17	59	61	-2	44	W L W L L	
18 Barnsley	38	12	7	19	46	62	-16	43	L L L L D	
19 Millwall	38	10	10	18	44	53	-9	40	W L L W L	
20 Nottingham Forest	37	11	5	21	40	58	-18	38	W L W L D	
21 Bristol City	38	9	8	21	32	61	-29	35	L D L W L	
22 Coventry City	38	7	11	20	33	52	-19	32	D D D D L	
23 Doncaster Rovers	37	7	10	20	33	61	-28	31	L L D D W	
24 Portsmouth	37	10	10	17	38	41	-3	30	W D L L L	

Greece Super League



	Last5games Most recent first									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts		
1 Olympiakos Piraeus	24	18	4	2	53	14	+39	58	W W W W W	
2 Panathinaikos	24	17	3	4	43	20	+23	54	L L W W L	
3 Atromitos	25	12	8	5	29	22	+7	44	D W W W W	
4 PAOK	25	12	7	6	35	21	+14	43	D L W D W	
5 AEK Athens	25	12	6	7	31	25	+6	42	D W L D L	
6 Asteras Tripolis	25	11	5	9	21	23	-2	38	D W W W W	
7 Aris	25	9	9	7	23	21	+2	36	W L W D D	
8 OFI	25	9	6	10	23	23	+0	33	L L L D L	
9 Xanthi	25	8	5	12	25	29	-4	29	L L L L L	
10 Panionios	25	8	5	12	21	24	-3	29	W W L L D	
11 PAS Giannina	25	7	7	11	23	28	-5	28	W D W W L	
12 Levadiakos	25	7	6	12	24	37	-13	27	D D L L W	
13 Ergotelis	25	7	5	13	21	35	-14	26	W L L L D	
14 Panaitolikos	25	6	7	12	18	29	-11	25	D W W L L	
15 Kerkyra	25	6	6	13	23	36	-13	24	L W W L W	
16 Doxa Dramas	25	4	3	18	9	35	-26	15	L L L L W	

SPAIN La Liga



	Last5games Most recent first									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts		
1 Real Madrid	28	23	3	2	90	25	+65	72	D D W W W	
2 Barcelona	28	20	6	2	82	22	+60	66	W W W W W	
3 Valencia	28	13	8	7	44	33	+11	47	L W D W L	
4 Levante	28	13	5	10	41	38	+3	44	W W L W W	
5 Málaga	27	12	5	10	38	38	+0	41	D W W W L	
6 Osasuna	28	9	13	6	32	41	-9	40	D D W D W	
7 Atlético Madrid	28	10	9	9	39	34	+5	39	W L W D L	
8 Espanyol	27	11	6	10	35	36	-1	39	W W L L D	
9 Athletic Club	28	9	10	9	43	39	+4	37	L L L W D	
10 Rayo Vallecano	27	11	4	12	40	43	-3	37	W L W L W	
11 Mallorca	28	9	9	10	31	35	-4	36	W W D D L	
12 Getafe	28	9	9	10	28	35	-7	36	D W W L D	
13 Sevilla	27	8	9	10	27	31	-4	33	L L D W W	
14 Real Sociedad	28	9	6	13	31	40	-9	33	L L L W L	
15 Granada	28	9	4	15	27	43	-16	31	L W L L L	
16 Real Betis	27	9	3	15	31	41	-10	30	L L L D W	
17 Villarreal	28	6	10	12	28	42	-14	28	D L L L D	
18 Racing Santander	27	4	12	11	22	40	-18	24	L L L D L	
19 Sporting Gijón	28	6	6	16	27	53	-26	24	L L W L D	
20 Real Zaragoza	28	5	7	16	24	51	-27	22	W D L W L	

HOLLAND Eredivisie



	Last5games Most recent first									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts		
1 AZ	26	16	5	5	53	25	+28	53	D W W D L	
2 Ajax	26	15	7	4	68	33	+35	52	W W W W W	
3 Twente	26	15	6	5	68	31	+37	51	L L L W W	
4 PSV	26	15	6	5	68	38	+30	51	W L L W L	
5 Feyenoord	26	14	6	6	51	32	+19	48	W D W L D	
6 Heerenveen	26	13	9	4	57	41	+16	48	L W D D W	
7 Vitesse	26	12	5	9	34	29	+5	41	W W W L L	
8 RKC Waalwijk	26	10	4	12	28	38	-10	34	L W W W D	
9 Roda JC	26	11	1	14	44	56	-12	34	L W L L L	
10 NEC	26	10	3	13	30	35	-5	33	W W D W L	
11 Groningen	26	9	5	12	37	49	-12	32	L L L L W	
12 Heracles	26	8	6	12	39	41	-2	30	L L L L W	
13 Utrecht	26	7	9	10	39	42	-3	30	W D D L W	
14 NAC Breda	26	8	5	13	33	39	-6	29	D W L W L	
15 ADO Den Haag	26	7	7	12	29	50	-21	28	L W D L D	
16 VVV	26	7	4	15	31	58	-27	25	L L W W W	
17 Excelsior	26	4	6	16	21	58	-37	18	W L L L D	
18 De Graafschap	26	4	4	18	22	57	-35	16	L L L L W	

LEAGUE ONE



	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts	Last5games <i>Most recent first</i>
1 Charlton Athletic	38	24	10	4	70	30	+40	82	W D L L W
2 Sheffield United	38	22	7	9	73	41	+32	73	W D D W L
3 Sheffield Wedn...	38	21	8	9	66	45	+21	71	D W W W D
4 Huddersfield Town	37	17	17	3	70	38	+32	68	W D W D D
5 Milton Keynes Dons	37	18	12	7	71	39	+32	66	W D W L D
6 Carlisle United	36	15	12	9	53	55	-2	57	D D W W L
7 Stevenage	36	14	14	8	50	33	+17	56	D D W D D
8 Notts County	38	16	8	14	58	54	+4	56	L L W D W
9 Colchester United	37	12	15	10	49	48	+1	51	D D D W W
10 AFC Bournemouth	37	13	9	15	40	44	-4	48	W D L L L
11 Brentford	36	12	11	13	46	44	+2	47	L L L W L
12 Hartlepool United	38	12	11	15	42	46	-4	47	L D D L D
13 Preston North End	37	12	10	15	46	56	-10	46	D W L D D
14 Yeovil Town	38	12	10	16	50	63	-13	46	L W D W W
15 Tranmere Rovers	38	11	12	15	39	42	-3	45	W D W W D
16 Oldham Athletic	36	12	9	15	44	54	-10	45	W L L L L
17 Leyton Orient	36	11	10	15	40	55	-15	43	L W L L D
18 Scunthorpe United	38	8	18	12	48	52	-4	42	D D D W W
19 Bury	38	11	9	18	48	69	-21	42	D L L L D
20 Wycombe Wanderers	38	11	6	21	56	71	-15	39	W D W D L
21 Walsall	37	7	17	13	37	43	-6	38	D D W D W
22 Rochdale	38	7	13	18	35	60	-25	34	L W D L D
23 Exeter City	38	8	10	20	33	60	-27	34	L L L L D
24 Chesterfield	38	7	12	19	40	62	-22	33	L D D D W

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